





is Other Wife.

22
By ROSE ASHLEIGH.

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His Other Wife.

A NOVEL.

40
✓ BY

ROSE ASHLEIGH,

Author of "A WOMAN'S WAGER," etc., etc.

"Let none think to fly the danger,
For soon or late love is his own avenger."

BYRON.

NEW YORK:
STREET & SMITH, Publishers,
31 Rose Street.

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HIS OTHER WIFE.

CHAPTER I.

SLEEPING BEAUTY.

“Lucerne to be sold! How dreadful!”

“Dreadful? Humph! I really can’t see why that is more deplorable than any other occurrence.”

“Is there nothing shocking to your sense of humanity, Mr. Croft, in the fact that two women, nobly born and tenderly reared, are to be expelled by the law from the grand ancestral estates that have sheltered their fathers for over a century, and they left houseless and penniless in a country like this?”

“My dear Warren, when you’ve lived as long as I have, you’ll spend less Quixotic sympathy on cold, haughty patricians like Mrs. Morgan and her imperial daughter.”

As he uttered the last sentence, Mathew Croft, the leading attorney of —, Fla., by a caustic curl of his grizzly mustache showed a very ugly set of teeth, that gave to his wide mouth the look of a ferocious beast with tusks. The deep-set, steel-colored eyes that glittered under shaggy arches of a hue to match his beard, wore an expression

of malignant enjoyment that is not good to see in a man's look when women are in the question.

It seemed to revolt and disgust his companion, the pale, homely, self-contained young man whom he had addressed as his "dear Warren," for the latter turned abruptly and resumed the perusal of a document from which he had just read something which caused him to give expression to the opening sentences of this story.

Mr. Croft let his keen glances rest a moment longer on the firm, inscrutable face of his junior partner, as if seeking to inform himself of other motives than mere chivalrous sentiments for the interest the young man evinced in the broken fortunes of Mrs. and Miss Morgan of Lucerne. Gordon Warren's countenance never said to any one more than he willed it should, and now even its passing emotion of pained surprise had vanished from it—it was unrevealing as a stone cast.

"I was not aware that you had any acquaintanceship with the ladies of Lucerne, Warren," Mr. Croft said, with an inquisitorial tone that seemed to displease the other, who answered curtly, without looking up from the paper:

"Nor have I, sir; but I suppose a man may regard the hard lines that adversity draws about frail creatures like those, even with all the distinctness of class between him and them."

"That's what I call making a fool of himself, then. How much do you suppose it would disturb their fine heads to hear that you were starving to-morrow?"

Warren made no answer ; he continued to read as if he had not heard the taunt.

Mr. Croft went on :

“But since you are so soft about the widow’s troubles, I’ll give her the benefit of your consideration, and let you take these papers out for her signature this afternoon. It may soften the blow some to have it dealt her by an executioner so sympathetic.”

To this Warren made no rejoinder, but said :

“Is it not a little strange that the misfortunes of this family have fallen so suddenly? I have never heard a suspicion of the insolvency of Mrs. Morgan’s property before reading these statements.”

“Not in the least strange. The management of Mrs. Morgan’s affairs having been in my hands solely, it has been my care to keep them secure from public notice up to the present time ; but, as you see by the showing of these papers, secrecy is no longer possible—creditors are pressing, and, either by private sale or on the block, Lucerne must go to satisfy the claims. Fortunately, I have been able to effect an advantageous sale of the property to a rich New York friend of mine, on conditions that he can have possession by the end of October. There remains nothing now to complete the arrangement but Mrs. Morgan’s signature to those documents. You will oblige me, and doubtless do her a favor, by taking them to her at once, that I may be able to post a letter this

evening announcing the conclusion of the business to my client."

"Of course I shall take the papers if you desire it; but I don't quite see how my performance of that odious duty is to confer a favor on Mrs. Morgan."

"Simply on the ground that a sick child would prefer to take its physic from any other hand than the doctor's."

Mr. Croft gave a low chuckle of satirical mirth as he uttered this grim pleasantry.

"How much of the purchase money will the widow have after her debts are paid?" asked Warren, as he refolded the legal scrip which transferred the Lucerne property to an alien and a stranger.

"Not a cent; it all goes to mortgagees."

"What is to become of these women then?"

"That is not my affair, nor yours, I think."

Evidently the senior lawyer meant to close the discussion by the last remark, which was accented with that insolence of power that coarse natures love to assume toward their dependents.

Duly abhorring the mission imposed upon him, yet having no just reason to refuse it, young Warren set out to perform it.

As he had stated, he had no personal knowledge whatever of the parties concerned in the transaction, and had never set his eyes on either of the ladies.

Mrs. Morgan and her daughter had been residing at the North during several years, and had only recently returned

to their elegant home in Florida. But under no circumstances would Mr. Warren have been socially acquainted with persons so far removed from his own humble rank. By sheer force of genius and manhood the young lawyer had emerged from obscure poverty at that period in Southern life when even affluence could not atone for the disgrace of being a tradesman or a plebeian.

He had not yet worn the professional dignity sufficiently long to win him admittance into the patrician circles, even had he been properly desirous of that distinction. But, unhappily for his future prospects, he had tenaciously clung to a vulgar contempt for the condescensions of the upper classes. He came of a cold-blooded race of independent artisans, who asked nothing better of the world than a chance to win their own bread, and eat it as they chose. Such had been Gordon Warren's success at the bar that, with a little enterprise, he might easily have procured the recognition of society, with whom a laurel wreath would be accepted as ample apology for a very conspicuous pair of horns. But the steady acquisition of popular favor and patronage seemed to fill the measure of his ambition; and though all the world spoke of his eloquence and talent, he made no effort to use them as levers to social preferment.

One pair of eyes only watched, with fond and loving tenderness, the gathering sunrays about the quiet, sober brow of the young attorney. They were old eyes, and faded by many tears, but their welcome seemed all suffi-

cient for the heart-peace of the tireless student, who knew few other paths than the one which led from his widowed mother's cottage to the office of Croft & Warren, counselors-at-law.

To good Dame Warren her "brave laddie" had not his equal in all the width of the world, but much I doubt if other women would have said so much of his outer man. A tall, spare, vigorous frame, with enough of supple grace and practical strength to give his physique a somewhat formidable aspect; a well-poised head, that sat haughtily on his broad shoulders; clear, large eyes, with a look of eternal calm in them; heavy black eyebrows, that almost met over a straight nose; a firm, chaste mouth, lightly shrouded by a very black mustache that intensified the sallow paleness of his complexion, made up the *personnel* of our hero—Dame Warren's and mine, dear reader—yours hereafter, if you will. With all this depth of coloring and sharpness of outline, there was a passionless repose about him that won Gordon Warren the reputation of a cold, stern man. Perhaps his mother alone knew that he carried a warm, loving heart in his breast. Not much of it showed on the surface, but one might easily see that the resolute quiet on his face was like the calm that may rest on a sea full of terrors.

Lucerne lay three miles beyond the city. Thither Mr. Warren proceeded afoot along the shady road, hedged with magnolia and live-oak trees of great size. The fervid haze of a warm September afternoon gilded the tops of the

forest trees, while beneath them a soft gloom, as of slowly-coming twilight, made tender mystery. A lazy wind stirred overhead, and filled the voluptuous air with the scent of orange groves lying close about the white villa that nestled its wings in the luxuriance of tropical shrubbery that was over a hundred years old. At a light, swinging pace, Warren traversed the lovely sketch of woodland that lay between the city and the lake shore on which the Lucerne mansion stood. A miniature of the famous Swiss water was the small lagoon that now reflected the after-glow of sunset. Resisting his impulse to pause on the steep banks of myrtle trees that inclosed the lake, Warren hastened along the winding walk that led to a broad, paved veranda in front of the building. A cornice of ivy fringed the low eaves of the piazza and climbed about the slender stone columns, giving an appearance of greater antiquity to the quaint, half-mediæval architecture of the building. Coolness and profound quiet were the most noticeable influences of the scene. No sound of human or animal life troubled the evening hush, that was dream-like and vague.

The visitor felt himself strangely spelled by the utter silence that reigned without and within the closed shutters. He had a reluctance to touch the heavy silver knocker on the hall door, lest the sound thereof might startle ghosts of a vanished time from out the labyrinthine arcades of the aged lime trees.

And then he remembered, with a pang, that his presence

here was the harbinger of doom and sorrow to two helpless darlings of fortune, now to learn for the first time what want and privation could do to enervated natures that had never learned to endure. Growing restive under this thought, he sounded the alarm impatiently, and was admitted by a stately old negress into the dim hall-way, and thence shown into a suite of rooms on the left side of the vestibule. At the entrance of these the dusky guide left him to take his card to Mrs. Morgan.

Heated by his rapid walk, Warren experienced a delicious sense of refreshment as he glanced down the length of these chambers, all opening together through archways supported on gray marble columns, and draped with lace curtains. The neutral tints of the walls deepened still more the tender shadows of the fading day, and the figures of statuary stood out in spectral distinctness here and there against their surrounding of sober-hued furniture. Presently, as his sight grew accustomed to the dimness, he discerned, through soft tones of roseate light that stole in from the crevices of the western windows, an object that startled his sensuous interest keenly. This was the form of a woman lying at full length upon a gorgeous tiger-skin on the floor of the end room. She seemed to be fast asleep. The face was turned toward him, and rested on a bare arm that was curled, in the fashion of a sleepy kitten's, under her head. An open book lay beside her; she had lapsed from its pages into her siesta. Almost unconsciously the young man had drawn nearer, and

stopped within a few paces of the sleeper. Had he been an artist, he would probably have thought of Cybele, heavy-limbed and white, as he looked on the large, soft loveliness of luxuriant curves and snowy flesh, too lightly veiled in the thin folds of a muslin *negligee*, that clung as closely as the drapery of an Aurora standing hard by in the window recess.

Nothing could excel the languid grace of her pose, as she lay there in the unconscious abandonment of sleep. Magnificent lengths of bronze-colored hair flowed loose about her throat and shoulders, and but for the light, panting breath that warmed her parted lips into a scarlet glow, one could scarce have said she was not a waxen mold, too perfect and too fair for reality. Despite the intense sensuousness of her rich, redundant beauty, there was a delicate idealism, too, in its utter repose. She seemed to exhale a soft, intoxicating atmosphere from her slumbering form. Involuntarily Warren leaned closer to breathe it. His intent gaze fed feverishly upon the wonderful beauty of this woman. All silent and motionless as it was, it bewildered and enchanted him so that he felt dizzy. He had seen and been near beautiful women often before, and had not felt the smallest care for them—he had even fancied himself rather impervious to feminine charms; but now he trembled like a snared bird in presence of this creature, whose powers were all fast locked in slumber.

At last his steady look seemed to disturb her; the long,

ruddy lashes quivered a little, then swept upward from the purple warmth of humid eyes that seemed still pursuing dreams, so far off their tremulous regard.

She did a very unromantic thing, dear reader—she yawned, and stretched her splendid arms above her head, and then rose on her elbow, wide awake, and curiously scanning the stranger who stood before her.

“Well, sir?” she said, half smiling, half annoyed.

CHAPTER II.

THE WIDOW'S CONFESSION.

The singular self-possession of the young woman instantly relieved the visitor of the acute embarrassment he had felt a moment previous to her question, and in a few words Mr. Warren explained his intrusion upon her afternoon nap.

With a wondrous serpentine movement, in which scarcely any muscular action was visible, the young lady rose to her feet, as she said, laughing softly :

“I shall have to be more careful how I lie down to read in the parlors. We seldom have a visitor at this hour, and this place is the stillest and coolest—and accidents will happen.”

She laughed again as she drew a chair forward, and added :

“Pray be seated, and I will see that mamma comes to you.”

Strangely enough, Warren felt that he would rather she staid, but he did not have the nerve just then to tell her so.

Her light garments swept his feet as she glided past him with a wax-like ophidian grace that matched her dazzling beauty well. Instead of taking the chair she had offered, Warren stood looking after her, and feeling all his pulses quickened as by electricity. The touch of her filmy robe had thrilled him through by the nameless power of that wonderful something for which the wisdom of science has found no term more definite than magnetism. The air about him seemed vital with subtle emanations from the warm luster of her glance, the auriferous shine of her fragrant hair. About the tiger-skin from which she had arisen there remained, to his excited fancy, a soft odor of crushed roses, that came to him hauntingly after she had passed out of sight.

He knew at once this must be Leda, of whose rare beauty he had heard other men rave.

Perhaps he would soon have called himself a fool for permitting his sensibilities to be disturbed by the loveliness of a woman whose lot was separated from his own by the great gulf of caste ; but before he had time to make so wise a comment upon his emotions, Mrs. Morgan entered the first of the three parlors.

THE WIDOW'S CONFESSION.

Warren stepped forward to meet the slender, delicate, and intensely aristocratic woman, who approached him feebly, as if scarcely able to sustain herself in walking. He saw at a glance that she was an invalid, in the last stage of some fatal malady, but still fair as a dream.

She took the nearest chair, and held out a frail hand that was bloodless and wasted. For a moment she gasped painfully without trying to speak; the exertion of crossing the house had exhausted her.

Warren clasped the pallid fingers, and asked, with anxious concern:

“Can I get you anything, madam?”

She smiled, shook her head, and pointed to a seat beside her.

“I am a little more ill than usual this evening, and moving has unnerved me. I shall be over it presently. Give me some air, please.”

She glanced toward the closed blinds of a French window that gave upon the piazza. Warren opened it, and a stream of cool, vapor-laden air from the lake flowed in. Mrs. Morgan opened her mouth to breathe in a long draught of it.

The sky was still aglow, and as its radiance of rose and saffron tints fell over her face, the woman looked unearthly as a disembodied spirit.

Perhaps the late vision of Leda's superb health and gorgeous coloring had sharpened his perceptions painfully to the contrast which her mother's transparent fragility

now presented. Warren could scarcely believe that this diaphanous being, that reminded him of the "lamp of naphtha in an alabaster vase," could be the parent of that other organism so richly and almost superfluously endowed with strength and vigor.

Mrs. Morgan seemed sensibly touched by the reverent and almost tender solicitude with which Warren regarded her during the paroxysm of weakness, from which she was now sufficiently recovered to say :

"Do not look so troubled ; it is over now."

He thought it would soon be over forever and aye, and his heart shrank so much from the task he had come to perform, that he resolved to leave it unattended to. But Mrs. Morgan defeated his considerate determination by adding :

"I presume that you come to me from Mr. Croft with the papers I agreed to sign to-day?"

"Yes, madam, the papers are here ; but, in your present condition, you have every right to postpone a mere business formality which can stand for a few days.

"Thank you, Mr. Warren, for the thoughtful suggestion ; but I shall never be better able to make an exertion than now—and what could delay avail me ? I suppose you are thoroughly acquainted with the unhappy condition of my affairs?"

"I learned only this morning by a hasty review of these statements that your estates are to pass to a stranger, dear madam, and much I grieve that it is so."

"You are very kind, sir, to feel so. But can it be possible that you knew nothing of my embarrassments until to-day?"

"Truly nothing whatever."

"Are you not Mr. Croft's business partner, as well as professionally associated with him?"

"Yes; but in your case he reserved the right, as your friend and my senior, to keep your affairs to himself."

Mrs. Morgan smiled bitterly. She was silent for a few moments; then, turning herself with an eager motion to where Warren sat beside her, she laid her fingers on his arm, and said, earnestly:

"Mr. Warren, do you believe that motives of consideration for me prompted Mr. Croft's reticence toward you in this business?"

"He distinctly told me that to-day, and I have no reason to doubt his assertion."

"Then I will give you one. It is proper that you shall hear my version of this transaction before receiving my signature to these papers, which must hereafter inculpate you, as Mathew Croft's partner, in one of the most unholy frauds ever practiced on a helpless woman by a dark and cruel man."

She halted in her speech to take breath. Her cheek had flushed faintly and then grown more ghastly during her excited remarks.

Now there was something terrible in the hueless face, lit by the wild and desperate eyes of a woman half mad-

dened by a secret torture, that Warren could see was at that instant wrenching at her heart.

He seemed afraid of the consequences of her further effort to talk, and said, with decision :

“Madam, I cannot allow you to tax your feeble powers in my behalf. If you say there has been wrong-doing in my partner’s conduct of your affairs, I will insist upon a full investigation before I allow this sale to go forward.”

“You would insist in vain; you can learn from no other source than my confession all the black infamy with which that man—that *fiend*—has netted in my life. He never dreamed its history would be revealed by me; nor could it have been torn from me by torture, except to save the honor of a taintless character like yours. I should not rest in my grave if I left you in ignorance of the treachery with which you are surrounded in your connection with Mathew Croft.”

“Some other time, then; not to-day—you cannot bear it.”

“Alas! I have no surety of any to-morrows. Besides, there is something in your face that woos my confidence strangely. I fain would intrust you with knowledge that may hereafter stand between my child and dreadful harm.”

“In that case, dear lady, speak on. I shall feel it a privilege to ease your heart of the sad case.”

“Come nearer,” she whispered, as she leaned more heavily upon the arm on which her hand still rested, till her tremulous white lips were very close to his ear.

"Judge now what cause I have to pronounce your partner a cruel traitor," said Mrs. Morgan, as she finished a recital that had sent the hot, indignant blood with tumultuous force through the knightly breast of Gordon Warren.

He had heard her through without a comment; and now his cheek was flushed, and his eye glittered as he took the weak hand from his arm and raised it to his lips. He said, with suppressed feeling :

"I were unworthy the name of man, far less of gentleman, did I suffer any consideration of personal interest to hinder me from giving whatever aid I can to extricating you and yours from the tissue of false appearances with which you believe yourself environed. But the matter is one of extreme delicacy, in which I must proceed with the utmost caution. Trust me implicitly, I beg of you."

"You must know that I have done that unasked."

"I am proud of it, madam."

"In my turn, I beg one favor—never, under any circumstances, let Leda know a breath of what has transpired."

"Can it be that Miss Morgan is ignorant of your pecuniary distress?"

"Not entirely; yet she does not dream of the dire strait to which my affairs have come. I thought it useless to give her pain until it no longer could be avoided."

"Your wish shall, of course, govern me. Yet I think it would be wisest to have her know."

“Perhaps wisest; but, for reasons I cannot give you, I insist that she shall not.”

“Then it shall be as you say.”

“I am not to sign these papers now?”

“Not now, or ever, I trust.”

As he spoke, Warren rose to his feet, and under the stern repression of his manner there throbbed a passionate purpose, that made Mrs. Morgan conscious of having linked the young stranger's future destiny with her own misfortunes—how, or to what end, remained to be seen. Now that she had unburdened her heart of its secret, the little store of strength that was in her failed quite.

“I have no words to thank you for your sympathy, Mr. Warren. I—I——”

The sentence perished unfinished on her pallid lips, from which flowed a dark stream over the spotless cambric of her robe, and Mrs. Morgan fell heavily forward in a swoon.

Warren lifted her in his arms and laid her upon a couch, stanching the life-tide with his handkerchief, after sounding the bell for assistance.

Miss Morgan appeared very quickly, and, by her desire, Warren removed the insensible woman to her bed-chamber in the opposite wing of the house.

“Wait in the parlors until I come to you,” said Leda, as she motioned him away and assumed the care of her mother's restoration.

The young man saw at once that it was a sad duty, with

which the girl had become familiar. She showed no nervousness nor excitement whatever, but seemed confident in her skill. He therefore withdrew to the room in which he had first beheld the beautiful tableau, and half an hour later Leda appeared through the veiled archways, bearing in one hand a small lighted lamp, behind which her face shone as that of a young goddess.

"Your mother is better, I trust?" said Warren, as he moved forward to meet her.

"Yes; she is now asleep—she always slumbers profoundly for hours after one of these attacks. I want you to tell me what caused this one, Mr. Warren?"

She was standing opposite to him, with a small ebony table between, on which her right hand rested. Her tone was serious and anxious, yet a little imperious.

"Your mother was discussing an annoying business matter with me, Miss Morgan."

"Will you state to me the precise nature of that discussion?"

"I have not the right to do so. Mrs. Morgan is the proper person to answer your question."

"That is precisely what she will not do. I have asked her, prayed her to explain the meaning of certain words which she uttered in the first instant of consciousness after her swoon. She tells me they were meaningless ravings. I know better. There is some dreadful trouble on my mother's mind, and I think she has told you, a stranger, what she refuses to confide to her daughter. Is it so?"

“Miss Morgan, you must excuse me if I refuse to answer any questions concerning your mother’s business, of which I am simply the professional guardian for the present.”

Leda was silent for a few moments; then, with a swift movement, she reached across the table and placed her hand upon Warren’s, which also rested on the opposite edge of the ebony slab. She raised her eyes entreatingly, and said, softly:

“Do not speak to me like that; you see how ill she is—that at any moment I may lose her. She hides her trouble from me, because she loves me too well to pain me; but I ought to know it—you see that it is time I did know.”

The pressure of her warm, lissome fingers on his hand gave a powerful emphasis to her words, and Warren felt his fibers quiver to his very heart’s core under her touch.

“It grieves me to refuse you anything, but indeed, Miss Morgan, I cannot tell you one word of what your mother has been pleased to confide to me—I have no right. Command me to any extent that I can serve you otherwise.”

Leda drew her hand away, and said, with cool haughtiness:

“Thank you; but it is not likely I shall ask anything further of you after your treatment of my first request.”

“I am sorry that you take it so, but I have no option,” said Warren, with severe dignity.

"Do you know, sir, that I have never before had a gentleman speak so to me?"

"I conclude, then, that I am the first on whom you have urged a request so impossible for any gentleman to comply with."

His cool, incisive accents seemed intolerable to the young lady, who flushed hotly and asked, angrily:

"Do you mean to reprove me?"

"Certainly not—only to justify myself."

She looked keenly into his calm eyes, as if seeking to find the most vulnerable spot in his soul.

There was inexpressible dignity and manliness in his whole bearing as he stood fronting her, with his proud crest slightly raised, and his glance meeting hers, steadfast and patient.

Quick as thought all her aspect changed; the imperious challenge in her look gave place to that ineffable supplication that is a woman's most invincible argument when she appeals to the strength of true manhood. Her tones grew tenderly tremulous as she said:

"Forgive me; I was hasty. I do not demand, but I entreat you to tell me what my mother said to you. I must know, Mr. Warren."

A moment of delirium like drunkenness made his brain swim, as the ravishment of her beauty and the piteousness of her prayer besieged his soul and senses. He could only say, briefly:

"I cannot."

“You *will* not?”—this with a tender reproachfulness that hurt him like a stab.

“I *will* not,” he replied; but the pain of saying it had whitened his strong face.

Leda dropped her face in her hands, and sobbed passionately as a young child.

There are men who smile at cannon-balls and rifle-shots on a battle-field, that are the veriest cowards in presence of a weeping woman. And a beautiful woman in tears is a power more dangerous to a good man's honor than a whole army of tempting devils.

Gordon Warren had no data of experience on which to base his calculations concerning Miss Morgan's present conduct; nor would any amount of experience have altered the painfulness of his position. But he was not made of the stuff to let impulse dictate to principle, neither of such as could stand calmly by and see a woman shaken with grief.

Being intensely natural and healthy in all his feelings and sympathies, he behaved now exactly as if caste and conventionalism were unknown forces in the world; he forgot everything save that he was a strong man and Leda a weak girl, threatened with the saddest misfortunes in life—orphanage and poverty.

Crossing the narrow space which divided him from her, Warren took firm hold of both her wrists and drew her hands from her convulsed and tearful face.

“Look into my eyes,” said he, gently, “and let me

“speak to you as a man who would do you any service consistent with his manhood. I will be your true and loyal friend gladly, but I will not be yours or any woman’s slave, to speak as I am bidden and against my conscience. My profoundest sympathy is yours, but my honor is my own. Your mother has trusted me with her confidence, and I will perish rather than betray a syllable of it. Do you understand me now? I hope so, for I do not want to hurt or offend you.”

Leda was gazing up to his softened face now with a mute wonder, She had need for surprise. Never had man spoken to her as he spoke, nor so utterly ignored the sorceries of her beauty, to which life had been one unbroken triumphal march. Hitherto it had been hers to enchain and to command the strongest and sternest of men. To behold herself rebuked and chidden like a willful child by this homely stranger and low-born plebeian, passed all her conception of the fitness of things, and filled her with a bewilderment that made her doubt the evidence of her senses. His tight grasp on her delicate wrists assured her, however, that it was only too real.

For once in her life, she left artifice aside and behaved candidly. Perhaps his indomitable honesty of character and directness of purpose compelled her to frankness. However that was, she looked thoroughly ashamed of herself, and said, almost humbly, while smiling through her tears:

“I have behaved absurdly. Pray try to forget it, Mr.

Warren; and, believe me, I honor your firmness as much as I thank you for your forbearance. Promise me not to think of this foolish scene again."

"It may be best I should keep it well in mind," replied Warren, in his turn smiling brightly, as he let go her hands and withdrew a little way to rest his arm on the ledge of a cabinet close by.

"I don't blame you for saying so, but indeed I think I shall give you no cause hereafter to 'remember my former sins' against me."

She was laughing almost gayly now, though drying the tear-stains from her glowing cheeks.

"Do not promise anything so rash. A woman of so impetuous and variable a mood had best leave herself a wide margin in all friendly compacts, I fancy."

"I deserve to have you satirize me thus. You see how meekly I take the punishment."

"I trust you don't imagine I would punish you, even if I had the power to do so."

"Ah! you know that my own pride will do that sufficiently."

"And self-chastisement is always most beneficial. But, in this case, I think you may be absolved from further penance. Allow me to wish you good-evening."

"You will come again?"

"I shall be happy to call to-morrow to inquire after Mrs. Morgan's health."

He simply bowed, and passed out through the French window to the piazza.

Leda watched till she heard his step nearing the gate at the end of the gravel walk ; then she went out upon the paved veranda, and looked after his tall figure passing swiftly out of sight in the white radiance of a young moon.

She said, aloud :

"He is only the son of an emigrant tradesman, but I declare I've seen few noblemen with such an air of conscious superiority. It is absolutely ridiculous how little regard he seems to have for my beauty and station ! We must endeavor to alter that. He is well worth subjugating, and I find it insufferably dull at Lucerne."

CHAPTER III.

"THE DEAD LIVES."

Mrs. Morgan's extreme illness for the space of three weeks furnished a sufficient pretext to delay the business transactions which had involved Gordon Warren's fortunes with those of the occupants of Lucerne Villa.

For very important reasons he kept his own counsel for the present, determined on the course he would pursue

whenever his senior partner attempted to force matters to a conclusion.

Meantime Warren became a daily visitor at Lucerne. The constitutional tramp which invariably closed his day's work in all weather, now terminated each evening about dusk at Lucerne, whence he returned an hour or two later under the broadening harvest moon. Night after night he resolved to put a longer interval between his visits, but the next found him more reluctantly departing from the witcheries of Leda's fatal beauty, that seemed to burn itself into his brain as by a tracery of flame.

The weird and terrible mysteries of passional life were now for the first time being revealed to him, and the priestess that uttered the oracles was skilled as any Pythia of old in her ministry. She had resolved to fasten this grand young barbarian to her chariot wheel, and she did not make any of those mistakes in her strategy which could give an alarm to his discretion before she had ambushed him too securely for escape, even if he should desire it. Of this desire her knowledge of mankind made her very skeptical. She had found her captives always willing to be chained. That her own heart might suffer in the contest she was too much a woman to consider as a question of any moment. Besides, she felt herself mail-clad with regard to this man. He was neither rich nor well-born—*ergo*, it was impossible that she could care for him. Nevertheless, the vigor and freshness of his character, the subtlety of his intellect, and impressive dignity of

his nature, all combined to interest her beyond any sentiment ever before inspired in her vain, egotistical heart.

Not only did his visits dispel the dullness from Lucerne, but she found herself expecting his arrival each evening with a fevered impatience.

As for him, he did not know that it was the principle of her life, the law of her being, to make all men whom she fancied her slaves. He did not guess that the glad light in her eyes, which welcomed him daily to those delicious hours of intoxicating association with her beauty and cultured intelligence, was only an *ignis fatuus* that was luring him into the dismal sloughs where men too often sink their souls.

Moreover, her sad condition, of which she herself was ignorant, seemed to demand from him a degree of tender consideration and unremitting attention that placed his constant presence at Lucerne in the light of a duty.

Mrs. Morgan, too, seemed to find infinite pleasure in his visits. Even when too weak and ill to talk with him, she would have Leda bring him into her chamber, and silently enjoy the sprightly conversation between them.

From this quiescent state of blissful infatuation Mr. Warren was suddenly aroused by an announcement from his partner, Mr. Croft, that it was necessary for him (Warren) to depart forthwith to one of the North-west cities on urgent business for the law firm.

Besides all considerations of professional etiquette, which obliged him, as the younger member, to take upon

him the discharge of such a mission, Warren was indebted to Mr. Croft for great service and inestimable benefits during the hard days of his early struggles to secure the position he now occupied. He had, therefore, no alternative but to comply promptly. It was agreed between them that nothing should be done in the Lucerne business until his return from the West.

Not until he was on his way to say adieu to the ladies at Lucerne did Warren fairly realize the state of his feelings. The shock that was to break the spell of those rapt hours of basking in the noontide glory of Leda's beauty also sobered his brain, and showed him all the folly and madness of indulging his sensuous delight in the society of a woman from whom every consideration of prudence and honor separated his destiny.

Even if he were wild enough to dream of winning her love, each pulse of his noble heart protested against such a suit as dishonorable in him and unjust to her.

The world—*her* world—must never have occasion to say he had taken advantage of the misfortunes and necessities of a beautiful patrician lady to entrap her into an alliance that would ostracize her from her place in society, and possibly be a source of eternal regret to herself. For he could not deceive himself about her innate pride of birth, and insatiate ambition to be queen of the realm her beauty and position opened to her.

At this thought the mere idea of Leda Morgan marrying a social Pariah like himself caused the proud, sensitive

young barrister to flush to the roots of his hair with contempt for his insane speculations on the subject. He even took a grim satisfaction in the fast approaching separation that would put half a continent between him and the fateful loveliness that he now knew was poison to his moral being if, after this self-examination, he should continue to expose himself to its power.

He had about reached this point in his reflections, when the white paling around the lawn in front of the villa greeted his sight, and quickened the beat of his heart so that he felt faint. A few steps farther showed him Leda leaning over the low wicket gate awaiting him. Be sure that vision did not conduce much to calming his agitation. He had never thought her so fair as now—the pale, rosy tints of the evening chastened the fervid warmth of her splendid beauty, where she stood with her arms crossed over the top of the gate.

Some soft, silky fabric of turquoise blue draped her grand figure, and left her arms bare to the elbow, and her throat exposed; a cluster of late roses fastened back her hair, and their pink petals seemed pale beside the deep flush on her cheek as she held out her hands to Warren over the closed gate.

"You are late this evening," she said, half shyly. "I had begun to fear you would not come."

A glad word of thanks for her sweet impatience to see him rose from the tumultuous heart of the young man,

but he closed his lips firmly against it, and only said, with cold politeness :

"It is kind of you to care whether I came or staid. I hope your mother improves?"

"Mamma is much weaker to-day. I think my anxiety for her increased my wish to have you come this evening. You always leave her cheered and stronger."

"I rejoice to hear it; and if it be so, I am sorry this must be my last visit to her for many weeks."

Leda ceased to smile, and seemed both startled and pained, as she said :

"Why for many weeks? Are you going away?"

"Yes; to-morrow I depart on a long journey, for an indefinite time."

He tried to say it indifferently, but he was still too little practiced in the art of controlling his emotions to seem more than resigned to the necessity.

"*Must* you go?" asked Leda, and her tones were low and quivering, her eyes full of pain.

"I must go——"

It was all he could say, with her face pleading like that to his passionate heart.

"I shall feel very desolate when you are gone. Mamma grows feebler every day, and we have both learned to depend on you too much."

"You can never depend too much upon my devoted friendship, Miss Morgan; and, whether I go or stay, that

remains steadfastly yours and your mother's. But it is my duty to leave this place now."

"Ah! I know how inexorable you are about 'duty.' Yet could you not delay a little longer for—for mamma's sake?"

"Alas! no—not even for that. I have no choice but to go."

Leda was not the woman to let go a purpose easily, and something in Warren's forcibly controlled manner informed her of a stern struggle going on within him. She more than guessed that he was in revolt against the influence she had so adroitly laid upon him, and she knew that a rebel of his type is forever a lost subject. She determined to leave nothing undone to lull his soul back to the fatal dream from which absence and self-questioning would irrevocably awaken him. She laid her clasped hands over his shoulder, and said, softly:

"For my sake, then. I cannot bear to be left so lonely, with the fear that each day will bereave me of *her!*"

For the moment there was genuine passion in the woman's heart, as well as in the cunningly modulated tones of her rich voice, that could thrill the ear like a tremolo note of an organ when she chose. Warren felt every chord in his being vibrating to her soft appeal, and his powerful young frame was shaken as a reed in the wind by the weight of her clinging hands. He dared not trust his speech with the burden of feeling that welled in his heart

like the sea in a storm. The time was propitious for her purpose, and she knew well how to use it.

"You love me, and you will not leave me," she murmured, nestling her fragrant lips to his throat.

The chains of his stern resolves were all stricken loose from his wild heart by that light caress, and by no whim of his mind, but as wave meets wave in the deep wastes of the ocean, he folded his arms about her, answering only with the wordless reply that passed all eloquence of speech.

A moment he held her fast-locked against his turbulent heart, and then with an almost rude violence he drew himself from her, and hurriedly passed out of her sight on his way back to the town. He had only strength enough left to do this. He knew that if he staid he might be betrayed into saying what all time could not help him to unsay.

Leda was lost in amazement at his abrupt departure in a moment when no human power could have rent another man from the clasp of her ravishing arms.

The next morning, when Warren was already miles away on his journey, Miss Morgan received the following note :

"I should never have forgiven myself had I taken advantage of your loneliness and sorrow, and possibly your too keen appreciation of my poor attentions to your dear invalid, to let you bind yourself to the fortunes of one like me. You are young, beautiful, and so strangely endowed with that mightiest of human gifts—the power to

make yourself loved—that I should hate myself eternally if I could lure a star so bright from its orbit into the uncongenial sphere of my commonplace existence. I dare not ask you to share my life of stern endeavor—perhaps of failure. Only a dishonorable coward would so misuse your confidence. I will do what I can to save you from distress. While you require my friendship and devoted service, and until I know you safe and happy with one worthy to be your life's guardian and protector, I shall remain

"Yours to command, W——."

Leda smiled over this letter as she refolded it and locked it away in her desk.

She read between the formal lines, and was content to know that if it suited her to be patient with his chivalrous scruples, she easily might hold his great heart's allegiance forever.

* * * * *

Three weeks later.

Leda is alone at Lucerne. Mrs. Morgan has been two days in her grave.

"Honey, Mr. Croft is here, and waitin' in de parlor fur to see you."

It is old Aunt Charity, the negro nurse of her infancy, who thus addresses Leda.

Miss Morgan rose at once from the old mahogany cabinet in her dead mother's room, where she had been overlooking some papers and letters which Mrs. Morgan had desired her to collect and burn.

She glanced at her superb figure, now clad in mourning robes of soft Canton crepe, smoothed back the glossy

bands of her hair, and passed directly into the presence of the old family friend and attorney, Mathew Croft. She said, after bidding him good-day :

“I had your note last evening, sir, preparing me for a painful interview this morning. Will you kindly relieve my suspense at once?”

Mr. Croft looked embarrassed, twisted himself nervously, and with infinite awkwardness, upon his chair, showed his tusks, and thus delivered himself :

“Well, my dear, you are a brave woman, and I feel it is best to be candid and straightforward with you. In the fewest possible words, my dear Leda, this estate of Lucerne, the last remnant of your father’s vast property, is, and has for some time been, utterly insolvent, and covered with mortgages. I had, just before your dear mother’s last illness, by her consent and approval, concluded a sale of Lucerne to a Northern client of mine, at more advantageous terms than I had any reasonable hope of making, otherwise the property must have been sold at public outcry, to the highest bidder, to satisfy the claims of exacting creditors.”

“How is it that I never heard of this?” cried Miss Morgan, pale with pain and humiliation at her forlorn condition.

“It was your mother’s will that you should not know it. She wished to save you the blow as long as possible. But now I have no alternative but to tell you frankly.”

Leda was quite still for a few moments; she felt too

crushed to speak, too proud to lament; but nature and youth refused to be curbed by pride, and a despairing cry broke from her, despite her cruel effort to repress it.

"Is it true that I am homeless and a pauper, Mr. Croft?"

Mr. Croft did not answer immediately. He was looking at her with the changeful gleam in his eyes of one who is withholding a proposal at once improbable yet full of joy.

At length he leaned toward Leda, and took one of her hands between his own. He said, timidly, but eagerly:

"My dear, I should not have had the courage to make this terrible announcement to you if I did not have it in my power to offer you both a home and a fortune far surpassing the one you have lost. Believe me, beautiful Leda, all that I am and have is laid with pride at your feet. I am no longer young, but for that reason all the more capable of adoring and cherishing your royal youth and loveliness. You know that I am in a position to fulfill your highest dreams of social ambition. You have only to dictate—I to obey. Do I ask too much, dear child?"

"Give me time to think, Mr. Croft," gasped the girl; for between her sight and the elderly, distinguished suitor for her hand, had flitted a vision of the passion-pale young face of Gordon Warren as she saw it last, while he pressed that wild kiss on her lips.

"Alas! my dear, time is precisely the one thing which

I cannot give you. By becoming my wife you give me the right to come to the rescue of your property, and save it from sacrifice, and you from poverty and all its grim sufferings. Only in this way can I stop the legal proceedings which must proclaim your sad reverses to the world."

He touched the quick spot on Leda's nature now; he knew how little nerve she had to endure the bitter scoffs, and still more bitter compassion, of her social equals and rivals. Having found the wound, he pressed it hard.

"You know how the world of women will gloat over the downfall of the queen who has held empire so long; and, Leda, you are too delicate a flower to bear the biting blasts of adverse fate. I do not ask for your love now—I will win that hereafter. Only place your hand here in mine—that will be answer enough until you care to speak."

Leda closed her eyes; a violent shuddering seized her; the doom he painted seemed so unbearable—the escape from it scarcely less so; but in the latter her pride would be saved, though her heart might starve. She grew livid and cold with the horror of her own act, as she laid her fingers on the outstretched palm of Mathew Croft's hand.

* * * * *

It is just a week since Leda's wedding-day. Mrs. Croft is seated with her husband upon the sunlit piazza at Lucerne, and enduring, with a very bad grace, his uxorious attentions. A critical observer might easily discover that her patience with his amorous demonstrations was already

nearly exhausted. The enraptured bridegroom, however, with the sublime credulity of passion, seemed utterly content with his privilege to caress the glorious beauty of his young wife, and took no thought of the wide gap of years that divided his age from her fresh and perfect youth.

Mr. Croft had succeeded in inducing Leda to let her face lie for five minutes on his shoulder, while he bent over it in absorbed delight.

Thus engaged, neither of them perceived that a veiled and black-robed figure had entered the garden gate, and glided noiselessly up the walk till it stood upon the porch, casting its somber length of shadow over them where they leaned together.

Then they looked up, and fixed a curious gaze on the dismal apparition still shrouded in the long black vail.

"Who are you?" asked Mr. Croft, with rude impatience at the interruption.

The black figure made no other answer than to cast back the thick folds of the crepe from her face.

A wan, aged, and corpse-like face, with the pain-tracks deep upon it, and bands of snow-white hair lying close about a cold, immutable brow, whose aspect of changeless despair was simply terrible.

This pallid creature turned two coal-black eyes of startling brilliancy from one to the other as she stood just midway between the husband and wife. Her look seemed

to pierce like cold steel to the brain of both, for both grew pale as they met it.

Then she put out a lean, brown hand, with fingers like talons, and resting it on Mathew Croft's shoulder, while she kept her gaze on Leda, she said to the wife:

"Do you call this man your lawful husband?"

"Yes," answered Leda, in a low, scared way, shrinking back from the lurid eyes of the strange woman.

"*So do I,*" said the woman, dropping the words slowly from the bloodless lips, now drawn from discolored teeth in a horrid smile.

After a pause, during which the trio remained breathless, the gray woman leaned her ashen face nearer to Mr. Croft's, and added:

"*My husband, and my would-be murderer! Mathew Croft, the victim returns to punish your crime, or to wring from you atonement for her great wrongs. The dead lives!*"

CHAPTER IV.

MISSIONARY WORK.

It was true that the wife he believed to have been quiet in her grave for eighteen years now stood before Mathew Croft in the fell guise of an avenging spirit.

Just twenty years ago Mr. Croft had made his appear-

ance in the little frontier town of one of the new Western States, to which we will give the name of Bethel.

To the simple-minded citizens of Bethel he presented himself as a missionary preacher of the Evangelical persuasion, which, we know, leaves much scope for a clever and imaginative mind's operations upon a credulous community.

The inhabitants of Bethel were composed of emigrants from the densely crowded cities of the North-east. Tradesmen, artisans, farmers, and mechanics dwelt together, a band of brothers in their city of refuge, on the banks of one of those lovely and romantic rivers that wind patiently through the great mountain passes, and along the rich mineral soil, to the peaceful ocean beyond the golden shores of California.

The zealous missionary was received by these good folks as the patriarchs of old welcomed itinerant angels passing their way. It chanced that Mr. Croft found lodgement in the household of an old couple who were childless, but who had charge of a young relative who was their ward and adopted daughter.

This young lady possessed no other attraction than a snug little fortune, of which she was to have unrestricted possession on her eighteenth birthday.

Rachel Logan was a girl of strong passions, and only mediocre intelligence, but her sensibilities were painfully acute, and her personal homeliness was a source of exquisite torture to her.

She belonged to that unhappy class of women whose need of love and kindness amounts to an insatiate craving; yet, with this nature, she was forever confronted with the fact that both men and women turned from her with instinctive coldness. Even her adopted parents showed her only lukewarm affection. Consequently, at the tender age of seventeen, Rachel was a morbid cynic, who believed with her whole soul that God had created and placed her in the world for no other purpose than to suffer.

This girl attended the first meeting that assembled in the village church to listen to the new preacher's discourse on evangelical religion. The former pastor, who had recently died, had been a Presbyterian "of the most strictest sect," and Rachel had grown up under his terrible teachings of predestinarianism, and his fiery warnings of "the wrath to come."

The new minister took his text from St. John—"Love ye one another, my little children."

In a stream of rich and tender eloquence he poured out the waters of life on the arid sands of the congregation before him.

Men, women, and children, whose hearts had become seared as a desert by the fiery winds of doctrine which the stern old Knoxite had let loose from his pulpit each Sunday, were melted to tears by the soothing words of gospel love, mercy, and long-suffering patience which fell so sweetly from the missionary's lips.

Poor Rachel Logan almost sobbed her heart out.

After the meeting Mr. Croft joined the family at their seat in the end of the church, where they waited for him. He let the old pair, Mr. and Mrs. Reed, go on before, while he drew Rachel's hand upon his arm and led her homeward, playing the while upon her sentient heart-chords, as a cunning harper plays upon the well-attuned strings.

For several weeks he never spoke to the girl on any other subjects than religion. By the end of a month she adored him as a saint, but did not know that she loved him as a man.

Finally the new minister asked the old man Reed's consent to address his ward. It was promptly given, for, by that time, Mr. Croft had established himself in the very sanctuary of the people's heart.

Rachel almost died of ecstasy when she heard Mathew Croft ask her to be his wife. Never did a votary of the dreadful Moloch fling life's treasure into the idol's flames with joy more wild and reckless than that with which Rachel Logan abandoned herself, soul and body, to her love for this man.

They were married, and remained in Bethel until a short time after Mrs. Croft came into absolute possession of her handsome fortune, left her by some rich relative in the South-west.

Meantime, the old lady—her adopted mother—had died. Mr. Croft knew that the poor old man could not long survive his life's companion, yet he made no scruple of re-

moving with his wife to a distant State, leaving Mr. Reed to the care of his servants. He assigned to the Bethel church a good and sufficient reason for his change of residence—his health was breaking in the chill climate of that latitude—he was going to one of the Texan towns on the Gulf coast. A few weeks after being settled with her husband in the new locality, Mrs. Croft received news of her adopted father's death.

Now she was utterly alone in the world, with only her husband's love to rest her hungry heart upon. But this seemed entirely to satisfy her. She worshiped him with an abject and slavish devotion that was simply pitiful. His manner to her was considerate, kind, and occasionally affectionate; her own absorbed passion gilded it and supplied all its deficiencies. To be allowed to love him was of itself unutterable bliss.

In the city of — the minister and his wife boarded with a widow. Very soon Mrs. Croft's health became so delicate that she kept her bed most of the time. Mr. Croft consulted one or two physicians about her, but none seemed able to diagnose or treat her singular malady, which was mental as well as physical. They said her brain seemed to be softening.

Mr. Croft was untiring in his attentions. He daily received the prescriptions of the attending physician, and with his own hands prepared and administered the doses. Not only this, but he insisted on long professional discussions as to the nature and progress of her symptoms, and

the character and probable effects of the treatment she was receiving.

Finally the poor lady became so dangerously ill that her death was imminent. Mr. Croft seemed to be plunged in grief. The most intense sympathy was manifested by the family of the landlady in the husband's sorrow. The nurse was a very good old mulattress, a slave, who belonged to Mrs. Croft, having been left her as portion of her mother's estate, which consisted of a plantation and some negroes in Mississippi, but which Mrs. Croft's guardian had sold, converting the property into bonds and stocks. This old woman alone was reserved from among the negroes, and had always remained with Rachel. She seemed to *resent* her master's demonstrations of affliction. Of course, she dared not do so openly, but in a thousand mute ways she discovered the most intense dislike for and mistrust of Mr. Croft.

When Mrs. Croft found herself sinking so rapidly, she begged of her husband to draw up a legal paper emancipating the old woman, and bestowing on her the moderate sum of five hundred dollars, which, for fear of accidents, Mrs. Croft gave at once into Amy's hands.

Perhaps Mrs. Croft divined the antipathy which old Maum Amy felt toward her new master, and, knowing Mr. Croft's anti-slavery prejudices, was willing thus to relieve both parties from mutual relations, equally distasteful to both. The old woman received her gift of freedom, and its accompanying legacy, with tears and groans of gratitude.

“When I am dead, Maum Amy, you can go and find some of your people in Mississippi,” said Rachel, to her cld nurse, a few days after this transaction.

“Lord, missy! I ’spec’ de las’ one on ’em done dead and gone long ’fore dis time!”

“What! Do you think sixteen years has exhausted the lives of your whole family, Maum Amy?”

“Dat’s true. ’Tain’t been so long, but it ’pears like a monstrous long time since I lef’ dem on de ole plantation.”

It was a pathetic commentary on the way time had dragged by for the lonely old creature, away from the familiar scenes and faces of her past life.

It was Mr. Croft’s habit to dismiss the old woman from her mistress’ bed-chamber at a certain hour each evening, and take upon himself the care of waiting upon the invalid, and giving the prescriptions during the night. For some private reason, old Maum Amy chose to return, after an hour’s absence, on the night of the day during which her mistress had spoken with her of her approaching death.

With stealthy step the mulattress crossed the sitting-room adjoining the bed-chamber. It was near the hour for her mistress to take the opiate draught, without which her nights were sleepless and torturing. She knew this, and seemed desirous of seeing whether or not it was duly administered, and in what quantity; for, during several days past, she had observed that the invalid awoke in the

late morning utterly stupefied and exhausted. Maum Amy suspected that her master had given over-doses in order to be relieved of tedious night vigils by his sick wife's pillow.

Just as the nurse had posted herself where she could, from a place of concealment in the dark antechamber, observe the proceedings in Mrs. Croft's bedroom, she heard the little clock on her mistress' mantel-piece strike the hour of ten.

"It is time for your sedative dose, my love," said Mr. Croft to his wife.

"Yes, dearest, I am ready for it whenever you wish; but I think I'd rather suffer a little longer from this eating pain in my head, and be able to see you and touch your hand, than be eased by the drops into forgetfulness."

"You are a dear creature to feel so, Rachel, but I cannot allow you to indulge your heart at the expense of your head."

As he spoke he proceeded to measure out some liquid into an apothecary's glass. While thus engaged, he was standing behind the tall, old-fashioned bed-head, which stood free of the wall several feet, and formed a screened recess, where a table and wash-stand were placed. On the table bottles and glasses, with a night-lamp, were arranged.

Maum Amy occupied the proper angle in the next room to catch the full reflection of her master's proceedings from a large mirror on the bureau in the sick-chamber. But for this unexpected agent his operations must have been

hid from her, as he stood with his back between her and the table. But the glass presented the whole performance most vividly, and Mr. Croft's countenance as well.

Old Amy's fox-like eyes fastened their keen scrutiny upon the dark face that fronted her in the mirror. It would have attracted the gaze of a less suspicious pair of eyes than the mulattress'; for the sad, dejected expression which for days had commanded the condolence of all who looked on it, had now given place to one of devilish glee that made the old woman hold her breath with fear of what lay hid behind that grinning mask. He had poured into a wine-glass a much *smaller* quantity of the night-draught than Mrs. Croft was accustomed to take at intervals during the day. This he held balanced between his glittering eye and the lamp.

Satisfied with the portion he had put into the glass, Mr. Croft recorked the vial, and, placing the glass upon the table, took from his vest pocket a tiny flask of crystal, which he had to unwrap from a quantity of tissue paper.

As he took the glass stopple from this vial his fingers seemed to quiver intently, and the evil gleam grew more intense in his half-closed eyes. This vial emitted a singular odor that caused Mrs. Croft to say :

“What is burning, my dear?”

“Only a scrap of linen, my love, that fell into the lamp by accident just now.”

But Amy saw that no scrap of linen was anywhere to be seen near the lamp, and, furthermore, that her master had

started and turned white as a ghost at Mrs. Croft's question.

Having answered her thus, he poured the whole contents of the vial into the glass of medicine, and instantly placed the empty vial in the water-bowl, which was half filled with water.

"There, dear, drink your soothing drops; they will give you a long rest."

"Thank you, darling. How good you are to me. God bless you for this as for all your living acts toward me! Rest! and from *your* hands! Ah, the boon is doubly sweet after the long, weary pain!"

Thus speaking, after having swallowed the drink, Mrs. Croft lay back on her pillow, holding her husband's hand to her lips, and looking up to him gratefully, she added:

"How pale you are, dearest. Your vigils by me are telling on you. You shall lie here beside me, and rest, too. Only to have you so near will bring me repose sweeter than all the balms of the East."

"You shall not lack for that, or any ease that I can furnish you, my poor Rachel. Be still now. I will come to you presently when I have bathed my hands."

Retiring once more behind the head-piece of the antique bed, Mr. Croft dipped the wine-glass into the basin with the vial, and applied a sponge with soap to both, thoroughly cleansing his hands at the same time.

This done, he dried the glass and flask upon the towels. The flask he re-stopped and re-enveloped in its roll of

dark tissue paper. He then put it back into his pocket, but kept his fingers on it hesitatingly, as if reluctant to leave it there.

Afterward he glanced uneasily all round the chamber, examining different objects curiously. Evidently he was dissatisfied with his vest pocket as a repository for the empty little flask, and just as evidently he was seeking a more convenient place for it. His eye rested a moment on the open fire-place, where there was neither fire nor fuel to kindle one; the time was summer. *That* would not do.

Each spot seemed to present an equally uninviting prospect, till finally he glanced upward to the high faded tester of the bed canopy.

From the fringe of dust around the edge of this canopy, Mr. Croft opined that the housemaid's besom seldom aimed so high, and, by a light movement of his arm, he quickly tossed the little vial upward over the cornice of the tester. It fell noiselessly amid the layers of dust that too often attest the sacredness in which the "best room" of the house is held.

Stepping to the bedside, Mr. Croft saw that his wife had already fallen asleep.

A few hours later the household were aroused by the intelligence that Mrs. Croft was dead!

CHAPTER V.

AMY'S DISCOVERIES.

"I had fallen asleep beside her, and was waked up by hearing her gasp hoarsely, as if trying to call. By the time I could rise and lift her in my arms she was dead!"

This was the statement which the bereaved husband made, shaken with sobs, when the landlady and her daughters rushed into the chamber where Rachel lay with strangely composed features for one who had only a few moments previously passed through the death-struggle.

She might have been dead for days, so utterly at rest were all the lines of her face; indeed, one could easily have mistaken that breathless quiet for the rest of deep slumber.

As they all stood round the pale sleeper, exchanging those mysterious whispers and lugubrious glances proper to such melancholy occasions, the sound of hobbling feet in heavy shoes was heard rapidly nearing the room.

It was old Amy, who rushed headlong to the foot of the bed, where she fell on her knees with a prolonged howl.

"My poor chile! my poor chile! Lord in Hebben! What is dis niggar to do?"

No one present construed aright the frantic ejaculations

of the old nurse, nor dreamed of the chaos which was whirling her ignorant, slavish old brain to madness. She felt her heart bursting with a frightful conviction which she knew she dared not utter at the peril of her own life. Yet how to keep that secret in her breast and live, seemed at this moment a problem that she had need to refer to the "Lord in Hebben."

While she lay prone and convulsed with wild moans and sobs, she felt her master's hand close firmly, even harshly, on one of her arms, and his voice seemed to come hissing through clenched teeth to her ear.

He said, in a low, but distinct tone:

"Stop this noise instantly; this is no place for your loud lamentation!"

With a movement of half-savage grief, the old slave sprang up, and, wrenching herself free of the cold, resolute hand, she exclaimed, fiercely:

"Ain't I bin help fetch de chile into de worl', an' you 'spec' me no feel grief w'en she tek out of it *like dis*?"

A flash as of sparks seemed to fly from Mathew Croft's blazing eyes. He felt the desire to seize and throttle the faithful old creature, whose genuine suffering seemed to accuse his own crocodile tears. But, controlling himself, he turned away from her, lest he might be betrayed into some act which would create surprise or mistrust in the bystanders.

Mrs. Rowe, the landlady, succeeded in quieting Maum Amy's tempestuous lamentations by requiring her services

in the sad office of "laying out" the dead body of her mistress. When this was duly completed, Mrs. Rowe desired to speak in private with Mr. Croft. She said:

"I am sorry to ask such a thing of you, my dear sir, but one must look out for one's self and one's own in this selfish world, you know. It's mighty hot weather, Mr. Croft, and there's rumors of Yellow Jack, and typhus, and various other pestilence, as which, the Bible says, do walk in noonday. Now, if you would be so good, my dear Mr. Croft, as to consent for the body to be carried to the chapel in the cemetery, and there laid until the proper time for decent burial, it would take a load from my mind. This coast ain't healthy, and I've a large fam'ly, and a corpse a-lyin' in a house, under a tin roof, on an August day, might breed some bad fever or other that'd drive lodgers away."

With this the widow put her ample handkerchief to her eyes and held out her hand to the widower.

Not seeming to see the plump red fingers which his landlady reached to him, Mr. Croft said, with great kindness:

"I fully recognize the justice of your appeal, my good woman, and, of course—painful as it will be to my feelings—I will not hesitate to sacrifice them to the good of your family."

"I felt certain you'd see it so, sir—a Christiam minister like you is always sure to see things in the best light for other people. After all, sir, it will only be partin' from

the dear departed a few hours sooner. Under all the circumstances, and the extreme heat of the weather, the body oughtn't to stand out of the ground longer than to-night. A night fun'ral's a solemn and beautiful thing, sir—sight more interesting than a day fun'ral."

Again Mrs. Rowe wiped her widowed eyes and leered affectionately at the calm, sad face of the widower. There was no response in it to her tender sympathy.

It was agreed that the body should at once be coffined, and, in the early morning, removed to the small chapel in the cemetery until the preparations for its interment were properly and decorously completed.

Mr. Croft, accompanied by the widow and her two daughters, attended, in a close carriage, the slow progress of the hearse that bore the remains of Rachel Croft to the chapel.

Old Amy refused the permission given her to take the seat by the carriage driver, and instead she locked herself up in Mrs. Croft's bedroom. It must be at least two hours before the escort could return from the cemetery.

A few minutes only had elapsed since the procession turned the street corner on its slow way, when Amy emerged from the basement hall of the house, and, at her most rapid gait, took her course by the shortest route to a small shop in the suburbs of the city. The sun was already very hot when she reached a low awning of sail-cloth that was stretched in front of this shop.

Beneath the awning, upon a bench, sat the lean, lank

figure of an Indian. A leathern apron covered his knees, and upon the apron some dry herbs were lying; from these he seemed to be selecting leaves that he flung into a small copper vessel, under which an alcohol lamp burned. This was a famous quack doctor, held in great esteem by the lower classes of the town's folks, and infinitely contemned by the medical profession, with whose trade he meddled too successfully to suit their ideas of humanity. The simples of the Indian quack sometimes healed bad cases that, under the more scientific treatment of orthodox physicians, bid fair to take speedy adieu of life's troubles and pains.

"Would you mind steppin' inside the shop just one second, boss?" said the mulattress Amy, as she dropped a respectful courtesy to the Indian pharmacist.

"Why inside? What do you want of me?"

"Somethin' I can't tell outside, boss, else I nebber ben ax you fur come in."

There was a subdued air of suffering, anxiety, and dread all combined in Amy's tone and manner that held the attention of the Indian's queer black eyes. He put his herbs beside him on the bench, and stepped within the little shop, the mulattress following. Making sure that they were alone, Amy took from her bosom a small package, which she handed to the Indian.

"Kin you tell me anyt'ing 'bout sich kind of physic as is put up in dis fashion, boss?"

The doctor unwrapped the brown paper cover which enveloped the package, and then a quantity of dark tissue

paper, till he came to the vial, whose contents Amy had seen her master empty into her mistress' night-draught.

She was steadfastly, and with feline scrutiny, watching the Indian's face. It is worthy of comment here the degree of skill which negroes and all ignorant menial races achieve in the reading of faces. Amy seemed to belong to this class of physiognomical students; habitually she spoke little, but she used her eyes, and what she did say was generally to the point.

"Where did you get this, old woman?" asked the Indian, after having unwrapped and held the vial for a few moments to his keen, slender nostrils, that looked as if their capacity might vie with a grayhound's.

"I fine it, sah."

"Where did you find it?"

"Dat's my business, boss."

"It's mine also, now. If I cannot make you tell me the history of this vial, the *law* can. It has had poison of the most horrid kind in it. You shall not stir from this spot until I know all that you can tell about it."

"Blessed God! Jis' as I 'spected!" cried the old woman, while an ashy paleness came out on her brown skin. "*Pisen!* I know'd it! Lord, I know'd it!"

She seemed utterly to have forgotten the presence of the Indian, as well as his threats of detention. Only the vast horror of her discovery, or, rather, the realization of her prophetic fear, had any place in her mind.

"Well, let us hear what you know."

She stared at him in a bewildered way; her thoughts went back to that silent night-watch when she saw the fatal liquid poured out and given her mistress to drink, not daring to breathe, far less to interfere or protest against the deed. Her savage instincts had sounded Mathew Croft's nature, while more enlightened eyes saw only the "outside of the platter."

She knew he would have strangled her on the spot had she confessed a suspicion of his work, or even a knowledge of the act in which he was engaged.

"Speak, I say! Why do you stand staring like an idiot? Tell me all about this vial at once!"

"Neber! *neber!* NEBER!" she cried, in a frightened, solemn way, each time making her emphasis stronger.

"Then I shall hand you over to the police to be taken to prison, where you'll be made to tell."

At this Amy stood aghast. It was a phase of the matter that she had not considered—was wholly unprepared to meet. To incur for herself the vengeful wrath of Mr. Croft by such a confession as she must make to tell how she had come by that vial, and her suspicions concerning its dreadful instrumentality in her mistress' death, were propositions that fairly staggered her.

In her amaze and terror, she fell on her knees and entreated the Indian to restore the fatal flask to her, and let her replace it where she had found it. Instead of complying, he put it in his bosom, and informed her that she must go with him to the nearest police station, or be

forcibly carried thither. At this her entreaties became so piteous that the Indian thought well to pursue some other plan with her before resorting to an arrest. He managed to quiet her violent agitation, and then said, kindly :

“Whether you will or not, old woman, you are bound to testify to some one all that you know about this thing. I see very plainly that whatever crime has been done, you are innocent of any part in its guilt, and that in some way you are one of the sufferers by it. Now, your safest and best plan for yourself and all parties is to tell me, or some other reliable, clear-headed man, the whole history, and be advised how to proceed. Otherwise you may get yourself into dreadful trouble. As a slave, your rights in a court of justice are very scanty, and your wits not much to boast of. Come, make a clean breast of it, and I promise to stand by you, and see that no harm comes to you, if you are, as I believe, innocent.”

After a few more such encouraging assurances, Amy did tell substantially, but in her own jargon, just what has already been narrated.

“You say the body is to be deposited in the cemetery chapel until to-night, when it will be buried?”

“Dat’s ’bout w’at I gathered from de ’rangements, boss.”

The doctor was very silent and thoughtful for some time. Amy saw there was a serious question under consideration in his mind. At length he said :

“Well, return to the boarding-house. Conduct yourself as if nothing was on your mind ; keep out of your

master's sight as much as possible, and, when the family all retire for the night, come back here to me."

"Fur sartin I will, boss," said Amy, with grateful earnestness; for she instinctively divined that some purpose inimical to Croft's safety was formed in the mind of the Indian.

He then allowed her to depart, assuring her that it was not in the least likely that Mr. Croft would ever attempt to look up the vial; on the contrary, he predicted that the gentleman would speedily evacuate those premises altogether.

The Indian, who had acquired considerable knowledge of chemistry and the compounding of drugs while serving as errand boy to a drug store in his youth, and whose native genius for the art of medicine had been assiduously cultivated by observation and such desultory reading as he could gain access to, had formed in his own mind a conclusion of which he gave no hint to the mulattress. The woman who had drunk the contents of that vial was at that moment either a blackening corpse or not dead at all.

An overdose of the poison would instantly kill and discolor the victim—an underdose would induce a cataleptic sleep which so closely simulated death that the ablest anatomist might be deceived by the appearances.

Amy had emphatically stated that at the moment of being screwed up in her coffin Mrs. Croft had resembled a person fast asleep.

The Indian drew a startling inference from that fact.

CHAPTER VI.

THE INDIAN'S PATIENT.

"Really, sir, I have every wish to oblige you, but I do not feel at all sure that I have any right to open the coffin of Mr. Croft's wife, simply to satisfy the curiosity of a stranger."

These words were spoken by the keeper of the cemetery, to whom a dark man had made a request to be allowed a sight of the corpse in the chapel awaiting burial.

"I respect your feelings, Mr. Manton; but when I inform you that I am one of the officers of the Board of Health, and that I have reason to suspect in Mrs. Croft's case the presence of an epidemic disease, which I must ascertain in order to set forward proper precautionary measures against its spreading in the city, I think your hesitation will yield to that argument. Here are my papers."

"Of course, sir, I've nothing more to urge against it—only, if you think there may be contagion from the dead body, I would thank you much to excuse me from opening the coffin. I've a large family, sir, and may convey the bad air in my clothing."

The dark man smiled; here was a chance he had not counted on. He said, carelessly:

"I don't think you have any need to apprehend danger; yet, as you say, a large family must be considered, sir. Just give me a wrench to manage the screws with, and I'll make my examination without assistance. Yet, as you send me there alone, I suppose you'd as well not mention the fact to the husband or friends; it could do no special good, and would only harrow their feelings. Moreover, you *might* be charged with neglect of duty in sending me alone."

"Rest assured I'll say nothing about the matter, sir."

"Possibly it might be as well for you to stand guard at the gate there, to see that no one comes near the chapel till I return."

"It would be a good plan, though at this hour there isn't likely to be any one about the grounds. No harm to be careful, anyway."

While the officer of the health commission took his way, through the fading evening, to the little edifice at the further extremity of the burial grounds, the keeper passed in an opposite direction to guard the gate-way from intruders. It was not yet quite time to lock them for the night.

Half an hour elapsed before the health officer was seen emerging from the chapel. He walked first to the newly-made grave, which waited to receive the remains of the poor lady who had died so suddenly the previous night, then came forward at a slow pace to join the keeper at the gate.

“Well, sir, see any bad signs about the body?”

The health officer shook his head ominously, and then, looking round cautiously lest some bird of the air might hear and carry the matter, he said, under his breath :

“*Typhus!* but don’t breathe a syllable of it, as the whole town will be in a panic. I think it is only a sporadic case, and that prompt use of disinfectants about the locality will suffice to prevent any spreading. The sooner the body’s put in the ground the better.”

“Sexton’s to be on hand at seven; mighty near that hour now. Mr. Croft, with the minister and friends of the family expected, start at half-past. Ah! yonder’s a carriage now.”

“In that case, I’ll stop over and see the obsequies through,” said the health officer, who then withdrew into the keeper’s lodge, quite out of sight.

In due time he managed to mix, unobserved, with the small assemblage of friends who gathered in the chapel awaiting the arrival of the clergyman and the chief mourner, Mr. Croft. These important personages arrived in due time, and the funeral solemnities were then performed with the utmost decency.

“Dust to dust!” and the falling earth on the casket echoed the sad oration, so simple yet so expressive of that last condition of our mortality. The summer stars came out, as tenderly smiling through the cloudless ether as if pain and death were nowhere known upon the earth they blessed with their rays benign and pure.

And finally poor Rachel was left to her long sleep in the strange soil among strangers.

* * * * *

A little after midnight of that same day, the Indian doctor opened the door of his shop to admit the old mulattress.

"Well, Amy, what of your master?"

"Jis' as you say, boss, he neber come a-nigh dat room. He done move from de house 'ready."

"Where has he gone?"

"Put up at one of de hotels, sah. He tell Miss Rowe dat she mus' 'scuse him, but his heart could not stan' de 'stress ob sleepin' anoder night in de house whar *she* died."

"Are you sure he has gone no farther than the hotel?"

"Oh, he ain't lef' de town yet, but I not sure he will be in it much longer."

"Are his books and effects still in his rooms at the boarding-house?"

"Yes, sah. He ain't move nothin' yet."

"Could you manage to get me into these rooms without disturbing the family now?"

"Tink I could, boss. De door ob de settin'-room opens down on de garden by one little flight o' steps, an' I's got de key to *dat* door in my bosom dis minit."

"Good! We'll go at once."

The Indian stepped back into the small room that adjoined his shop, and Amy heard him bolt the shutters

securely. He then said a few strange words to a great mastiff that lay on the threshold between the shop and the bedroom, after which he motioned Amy to go on, and then locked the shop door after them.

As the nurse had said, the entrance into the rooms was simple enough after the street watch had been safely evaded, and, luckily for their purpose, late arrivals at a boarding-house do not attract too much notice.

The Indian left his shoes in the garden, and moved about the chamber so stealthily as to make no sound. Amy kept guard at the outer door while he made his inspection of the place.

First he proceeded to a minute examination of the various articles upon the table and washstand, where medicines and other things in use about the sick-room were collected.

Nothing had yet been changed, and nothing of a suspicious or illegitimate character met the searching eyes of the Indian doctor. Each and every object was closely scrutinized and carefully *smelled*. Last of all he took up a small piece of surgeon's sponge that hung by a thread on one end of a towel-rack.

It was now quite dry, but on applying it to his delicate nostrils, the Indian made a grimace. Ever so faintly, yet unmistakably, the sponge gave out the same odor that clung more powerfully to the empty vial which he had in his bosom. It was an odor that no one who had once inhaled it, after learning its fatal properties, could forget.

He remembered that Amy had told him of seeing Croft wash the vial and the glass with a sponge. This caused him to look about for the glass from which the poison had been administered; it was nowhere to be found. He inquired of Amy in a whisper concerning it; she supposed it may have been removed by some of the family.

“Find it in the morning if you can, and bring it to me.”

He had already put the sponge in his pocket, and was passing through the outer room on his way to the door on the garden steps, when the sight of a very curious old book in black letter type, lying open on a table which was well littered with other books, pamphlets, and papers, attracted his eye. He took the candle from Amy's hand, and placing it near the time-stained, half-ragged book, began to turn its leaves. It was in some language quite unfamiliar to his sight. He asked Amy if she had ever seen her master reading that book. She said she never had noticed what books he read, and that she did not remember having seen that special volume before.

Whether from its unusual age and appearance, or from the fact that it was in a strange language, that book arrested the Indian's interest very powerfully. He turned from it to a large, well-filled book-case, where he found many scholarly volumes in the ancient and modern tongues, but these gave him no concern.

He went back again and again to the rusty, worn book on the table. Amy was watching him like a cat, and now,

as he bent once more over the dark page, she stepped close to him, and whispered :

“Wha’ make you no tek ’em wid you?”

“I must leave no traces of any visitor here ; it would be missed, and a search made. It is not time for an investigation yet,” he said, as he reluctantly left the table.

The woman took up the volume, and, thrusting it into his hand, said :

“You tek ’em. I’ll tell dat I flung it in de fire wid the res’ ob de trash dat I’ll burn up here in de mornin’ fore anybody’s up.”

The Indian’s face lit with pleasure at the ingenuity of the suggestion, and he adopted it forthwith. He now put out the candle, and then bade Amy open the door and let him out.

He whispered to her at the step :

“Come to me again to-morrow night, and mind no one sees you.”

A little earlier than on the previous night, the Indian had the low signal from his dog that a visitor was at the door, and immediately after Amy rapped softly.

“Well, how did you manage the lie about the book?”

“Lord, boss, I thought one time dat book was ’bout to cost dis ole nigger’s head ! He look same like de very ole Satan when he miss it from de table, and ax me who tek it. I spoke up spry, an’ say :

“ ‘Sorry, sah, but dat old tore up book had fell on de floor ’mongst a pile of waste paper and trash, and I

jis' geddered dem all up an' burnt dem in de kitchen furnace.'

" 'Stead of gittin' mad at dis, he look very much satisfy, and say :

" 'All right ; it wasn't much account ; but you had no business to burn any book without first asking questions.' "

" 'Where is *he* now ? "

" 'Gone to Saint Louis, he *says*. He tole Miss Rowe to tek care of all his tings till she heard from him 'bout dem.' "

" 'And you ? "

" 'Oh, I'se b'long to myself now. Ain't I tell yer 'bout de poor chile givin' me my freedom an' five hundred dollar jis' afore she died ? "

" 'Did he consent ? "

" 'Sartinly ; *he* draw'd up de deed. I got it here wid de money. Tink he's berry willin' to git rid of me. We allus did 'spise one anoder from de fus' minit he started to court my poor young missus. Now he's got all her property, wot you s'pose he want wid one ole creetur like me ? "

" 'What do you mean to do with your freedom and your money ? "

" 'Injoy 'em de bes' I kin. *She* tell me fur go to my ole people in Mississippi. Lord knows uf I'd eber fine dem now. Spec dey done scatter to de four winds by dis time. Niggers don't stay togedder long arter dey ole owners dead an' gone.' "

“Suppose you let me employ you for a few weeks. I require a servant now to wait upon one of my patients, who boards with me, and you understand nursing. I'd give you fair wages.”

“Tank you, boss. I would'nt hab no 'jections to such 'rangement till I look round me a bit. Now dat *he's* gone off, dis place suits me as well as any.”

“Very well; you may come with me at once, and take my place by the patient. I need sleep.”

He led the way through the back room of the shop to a somewhat more commodious one above it, which they reached by means of a narrow stairway inside of the lower room.

A dim taper light burned in the wide, open fire-place, and on a low cot bed in a corner of the decently but poorly furnished chamber, a woman lay soundly asleep.

The mulattress crept softly to the bedside, and, with a low cry of horror, fell to the floor flat on her face.

The woman in the bed was Rachel Croft, sleeping as sweetly as a young child.

CHAPTER VII.

RACHEL.

An interval of five months has elapsed since the night old Amy fainted with fright beside the resurrected body of Rachel Croft.

We enter once more the small upper chamber over the back room of the Indian doctor's shop.

It is a cold, raw winter's day, the Gulf winds bite shrewdly, but within the little room it is warm and bright enough to keep one from absolute dejection. A heap of burning coal in the open fire-place makes the atmosphere soft and mild; and cheap, but gayly-flowered chintz curtains at the two small windows and round the bed, give an air of cheerfulness to the humble place.

Despite this, the figure of the woman who sits in the ingle nook, with her feet on the fender, and her eyes staring out through the tiny panes at the wind-blown clouds that are leaden and lowering, looks as if an eternal winter had settled upon her, morally and physically.

The hair that is closely drawn from her brow is quite dull and gray, as if the coloring matter had suddenly dried up at the roots, and, though her face is not old, it seems to have been blighted so utterly that a smile could not make its sunny way over those frozen and pallid

features. Only the vivid and startling brightness of deepest black eyes indicate the remains of a passionate life, which must once have quickened the stony face.

On the opposite side of the chimney an old woman sits in a low rocking-chair crooning a subdued air to the baby that she is hushing to sleep. But the little one will not rest, and the nurse rises and lays it on the pale woman's lap, to whom she says, coaxingly :

“Come, honey, let de chile nus' little bit ; she must be hungry—she won't go to sleep.”

The lady made no motion to notice or to nurse the fretful infant, but continued to gaze out at the dismal rack over the face of heaven.

The nurse removed and fed the baby from a bottle, after which it went to sleep and was placed in a cradle beside the bed.

With a long, compassionate look at the silent figure by the fireside, the nurse left the chamber and descended the narrow stairway just outside the door.

After a short space other steps were heard remounting, and the Indian entered the room with a bowl of some smoking broth in his hand.

He placed himself on a chair near to the lady, who had not given any sign of observing his entrance.

“My dear, you will drink a mouthful of this good broth for me, won't you? I made it with my own hands. It is excellent.”

"I want nothing," said the lady, in the cold, far-away tone of a speaking automaton.

"But all the same you will take it for my sake, and the child's."

"Always the same thing! Why should you care about me or the child? If you had left *his* work alone, both the baby and I would have been far better off. I shall never forgive you for meddling with what my husband saw fit to do."

"Poor soul! Well, you know I did it for the best. Don't be hard on me. Will you take the soup, dear?"

"Yes, anything to be rid of you, and left to myself. Give it to me."

She took the bowl, and drained it at a draught, as if it had been some nauseous dose, then impatiently thrust the vessel toward him.

He received it meekly, and regarded her with infinite pity; he knew she was half mad, and in nowise responsible for her speech. Yet it seemed to hurt him. He rose to go away, when she caught at him, and said, with a sudden burst of energy:

"Stay; tell me all about it again. Begin at the beginning, when he said, 'My love, it is time for your sedative dose.' Don't leave out a word—not a syllable of the story. Mind, I know it so well, I'll be sure to catch you if you miss a word."

Heaving a long breath, the Indian sat down to repeat the oft-told tale. It was, of course, only the minute and

detailed account of the horrid tragedy of which she had been the victim, which he was required each day to tell over to Rachel Croft.

The first time he related it to her was just after she recovered from the long illness in which she had lain for weeks subsequent to her rescue from the dreadful fate of being interred alive. She was sane then.

The Indian went through with his task, as the patient mother who tells the ghost or fairy tales to a tyrannical child, who must always hear it exactly the same way.

It was all circumstantially linked together, as we know the story up to the moment when the health officer interviewed the cemetery-keeper.

The Indian was saying :

“Of course, my dear, the health officer was *me*. I wanted to see what the poison had done to you, and I was just as much prepared to find you black in the face, and dead, as I was to see you in the trance. Luck favored me, and I had ample opportunity to take you out of the coffin and carry you into the organ loft till I could get a chance later to fetch you away.”

“But the empty coffin?” she interrupted, impatiently.

“Oh, we’re coming to that. I hid you well away in a dark corner behind the organ, and then ran out through the vestry-room to where a pile of loose rocks lay near a mound in process of construction—an ornamental mound, you know, for the ferns and ivy to grow over.”

“Yes. Well, and you——”

"Gathered an armful of the rocks till I had about the same weight as your body, and I fixed them in such a manner as there'd be no danger of their rolling. I put moss between them, you know."

"And then the——"

"And then the place got very dark, and I stepped out to look at the grave they had made for you."

"Ah! the sweet, clean, quiet new grave that I should have rested in so sweetly, as my love had put me to sleep, if you had only let me alone!"

He seemed quite used to this lament in this place, for he paused till it was over, and then went on:

"I managed to stay and mix in with the crowd who came to the funeral. I saw them bear out the coffin, and over it in the grave and cover it up, and heard the final hymn sung over the mound of yellow earth."

"And my love cried over the grave of his poor, tiresome wife that he had put to sleep?"

"Yes, he wept very *bitterly*!"

Here the Indian turned his face away that Rachel might not see its angry look. It always made her furious to think that he or any one blamed Mathew Croft for poisoning her. She smiled at his last words with a sort of ecstasy, as she murmured:

"Wasn't it worth dying for to have *his* tears fall for me? You see he *had* to poison me—it was the only way to be rid of me; but he was sorry for me because he could not love me."

“Well, they all went away; but I stopped at the keeper’s lodge, and asked him to let me keep the key of the cemetery gate that night, so that I might return and sprinkle the chapel with disinfectant acid, and that no bad air might be shut up in it. He agreed very readily. I waited until it was late and dark, and then I hired a small light cart, and drove myself out to the cemetery, and through the carriage drive in the grounds, close up to the chapel. It was easy enough to manage. I knew you’d not wake for hours into the next day, if then.”

“And you laid me on some blankets in the bottom of the cart?”

“Yes, and got you home all right about midnight—a little before Amy came to report.”

“Then you told Red Lion to take care of me while you went away with Amy?”

“Yes, and he always does what I tell him. The next evening, about midnight, you came to your consciousness; but I put you at once to sleep again—a healthy sleep this time, for I was afraid to let your poor brain work until the fumes of the poison had all vanished from it. You became very ill in spite of all my care, and lay for weeks with brain fever. I didn’t much hope to save you—much less the little one that was yet to see the light. But God took care that my remedies should prove effectual. That makes me know *He’s* got something very important for you and the child to do yet in this wicked world.”

“Ah, yes, I remember you said, the first time you told me all about it, that God had saved us to punish Mathew Croft’s crime. But you see you didn’t tell the truth. He shall never, never come to harm through me or mine while I have life to shield him from it. You know you had to swear eternal silence about all you knew in order to keep me from starving myself to death; and you know, too, that the day you utter a word that can bring the least suspicion to him, I will surely kill you, myself, and the child—as surely as God exists, I will!”

“Hush, dearie—be quiet; you know I’ve taken the oat, and will keep it.”

He spoke soothingly, for she was growing very much excited, as she always did when she thought or spoke of any one’s harming her husband.

Perhaps this was all miserable madness, as her preserver thought it; but even granting this, there was sad method in it. The wretched woman, whose soul was all passion, and whose heart was all flame, had spent all of both elements upon her love for this man. In the whole span of her existence she had felt no joy but that he had given her. She would, by a voluntary act, have died by torture only to give him one hour of the rapture she felt in loving and serving him.

And that love was so humble, and that service so abject, that it claimed no response, no reward. Only to see him, to hear him, to touch him, that was enough. Yet he had been good, and gentle, and very patient with

her. He had suffered her to inundate him with her wild, idolatrous love, and had never shrunk away from her, nor chided, nor seemed to hate her presence.

Remembering all this, and knowing now that he hid in his breast a hate so deep, a loathing so intense that it drove him to murder her in order to be rid of her goading devotion, she said in her heart :

“Another man would have neglected and ill-used me —would have made me suffer all the humiliating torments of his abhorrence and contempt. But this man bore with it, and was tender and kind until he could endure it no longer, and then he gently and mercifully put me to sleep, and his last word was a tender one. Shall I harm him or let him be harmed for this? Nay, I would let him trample my heart out a thousand times, if it were possible, but never, never harm him !”

More than once had Uriel, the Indian doctor, overheard such like soliloquies from “the poor maniac,” as he called Rachel ; and well he knew how worse than vain it would be for him to combat it in her present diseased condition of mind.

But he had faith in nature.

He felt that by sheer force of the youth and vitality in her frame, she would some day recover the normal state of her faculties ; and he was one of those unaccountably benign and selfless beings that seem to be sent by God to give the world assurance that divinity and humanity continue to abide together on earth, despite the unfriendly

atmosphere with which egotism, and greed, and lust, and vanity, and passion have filled our planet.

Uriel did good because he loved good. Every suffering atom of life was as a part of himself that suffered. He devoted himself to the healing art because it gave him an ecstasy of soul to ease the pain of even a dog. For a long time in his youth he would accept no more remuneration for his services and prescriptions than just sufficient to keep him from want; but after a while he saw that there was so much misery that his drugs could not alleviate, but which money might. He therefore altered his plan a little, and charged the poor nothing, the rich a good deal, for his skill. Thus he managed to equalize things somewhat. His own life he never altered; he continued to live in the little suburban shop, with its two rooms below and two above, where he began his practice as a quack physician and druggist. Some people called him a miser; but this was because they knew he made a great deal of money, and did not know how he spent it.

The singular case of Rachel Croft was precisely one to awaken all the grandest traits of a character like Uriel's. It turned the man into the providence. Here was a strange, solemn work for him. Heaven would show him, step by step, how it was to be done; he would simply wait, and act as he felt bidden. He was a professor of no special faith—that is to say, he followed no sect—but his religion was broad as God's universe, and reached

to God's throne, where it lay prostrate. His creed was so simple that a lisping child could learn and understand it.

"God made me; He is my Father; He loves me; He has a use for me; I believe in Him, and I trust Him to teach and to guide me."

That was the whole sum and substance of Uriel's theology; but it was enough to make him almost an angel.

Yet he could be a stern man with unworthy people. Sweet as a May wind at noon-time to the simple and ignorant, he was implacable as fate to the evil-doers and hypocrites in high places.

Hence the struggle that he had with himself to curb his hatred and resentment toward the cold-blooded villain who had martyred the soul of this weak woman—who had placed himself in God's stead to her adoring heart, and then murdered her with all the infamous calculation of a fiend.

But, for all this, Uriel was content to wait. He never yet had waited in vain; all dark places had been made light to him in the past—it would be so now, he was sure.

Meantime Heaven had sent these poor waifs to him, as wrecked barks are blown to a haven by winds one cannot trace to their source nor follow to their bourne. It is enough that they have come, and that the haven is safe and deep.

More than this, the shadows were lengthening on

Uriel's pathway, and his hearth was lonely; he had only the dog to comfort his long evenings, when the day was done.

He *might* have had wife and children! Oh, yes, he might, dear reader; but he had "waited" for these, along with other blessings, and God had not chosen to send them.

For poor Rachel the Indian now conceived the affection that a strong nature feels for a weak, lorn, helpless creature that has mutely claimed protection and kindness. She had been as a foundling laid at his door, and as such he had taken her to his affectionate care. Then the poor baby came—the child its father had willed should never look upon the sun. Both were sacred trusts from Heaven to Uriel's great heart. He took them in and sheltered them, and verily he had his reward.

CHAPTER VIII.

RACHEL'S COMMANDS.

A part of Uriel's prophecy came to pass. Health of mind came back to Rachel's disordered faculties; the dull, unnatural apathy passed from her, and the dear duties of maternity exerted their wonted influence. But her bodily health remained always feeble. One thing

changed not—her wifely allegiance to her husband—her womanly devotion to his safety rather than to her own happiness.

Under a changed name, she lived in the house of the Indian quack. He told the neighbors a very plausible story of his widowed niece having come to him, poor and foot-sore, from a long journey, one night, from a distant State—that he had given her a home with him, and would keep her as long as she would stay.

Nothing ever happened to create the least mistrust of Uriel's story; and so changed and aged was Rachel, that Mathew Croft himself would not have known her.

By all kinds of management, Rachel continued to follow her husband's career. Never did she lose sight of him or many weeks together, for Uriel's untiring exertions to feed her poor, lonely soul with this the only food it could take, obtained through newspapers and secret correspondence, the accounts of Croft's changes of residence.

Not more than five years elapsed before she found out that he had established himself in the practice of law at —, Florida, and from that period she received very regular accounts of his increasing reputation at the bar.

No rumors of his former ministerial profession followed him, and never a breath of any attentions of his to women reached the straining, watchful heart of the poor, loving wife, who felt that the one blow she could not bear would be the knowledge that some other woman had filled the place she had so awfully vacated in his life.

For the rest—his successes, his prosperity with the money he had gained by her supposed death, his great popularity in his new career—were all so much balm to her suffering heart. What did her woe matter if his life was happy and fortunate?

It was all very weak, and miserable, and slavish, no doubt, for her to live like this, and worship the hand that had given her the death-stab. But I suppose God knew best when He made a few women in this fashion. They seem to keep the idea of imperishable fidelity alive.

In the meantime, the child that had made its way through such strange perils into life, grew, and strengthened, and developed, like a hardy wild flower that no keenness of wind nor chilliness of frost can blight.

The strangest of all things connected with the little girl, Faith—such was the significant name that Uriel had given the baby when her mother refused either to name or to love her—was that she was beautiful.

The intense homeliness of her mother, the absolute ugliness of her father, had seemed to coalesce in such a manner as to produce the *lusus naturæ* of perfect fruit on warped and rugged boughs.

Faith Hilary was the girl's name.

Uriel had some latent romance in his nature, and it pleased him to find a harmonious conjunction of sounds to make up the name of this child of Providence. As for Rachel, she seemed wholly indifferent on the subject then, and for long months after.

But the time came when all her womanhood turned to motherhood, and she merged the passion of the wife into the tenderness of maternity. Faith was the representative of the one grand and perfect sentiment of her life. Her soul bowed down and worshiped the father and the child in one.

This atom of her husband's being that she had carried in her breast, and nourished on her heart's blood, now ascended the empty throne in her life, and reigned there with an absolute despotism.

The thought came often to Rachel's heart that, some day, when her feeble life quite flickered out, she would, in a dying confession, reveal her identity, and leave this beautiful angel as her vicegerent to comfort and bless the declining years of him whose love she had failed to win.

Until then little Faith must take her chances, for not even the consideration for her child's future ever gave her a thought of marrying her husband's, by the announcement of her own existence.

Uriel had enough and to spare, and he never wearied of telling Rachel that the white day in his life was that which gave him little Faith to love and cherish.

It needs not that all the history of these years in Uriel's home be set down here. They were very uneventful up to the time when Faith Hilary reached her sixteenth year. The joyous dawn-time, while still the dews of childhood glistened on the swelling flower-bud, shed on Faith's beauty all the ineffable flush and charm that mark the

approach of womanhood. Nothing fairer, or brighter, or more glad could be imagined, than this slender, dainty, star-eyed girl. So lovingly had she been sheltered from all the cares of life, so utterly unbiassed by social conventionalities, of which she knew nothing, that she was like a free and happy bird that flutters round the parent nest, taking no thought or care for the morrow.

One morning when she went as usual to join Uriel at his work among the little flower-beds in the back garden, she found him not.

“Surely he cannot be asleep after sunrise!” she said, for she knew that he rose with the lark.

She ran to his room to see if he had returned thither for any purpose; the door was closed, and all was quiet within. She returned softly, and there sat Uriel in his old leathern chair beside a little table, on which the lamp still burned. An unfinished letter lay open under his hand, his arm lay motionless on the other side of it, his head reclined upon the rusty cushion, and Faith said, laughing:

“The dear old father has written himself to sleep. I’ll wake him with a kiss.”

She bent her rosy mouth upon his forehead, and started from the touch of him with a shriek of pain and fear.

The old man would never wake to hers nor any mortal’s touch again. He was quite dead.

* * * * *

Rachel and her child were now alone in the world, the

mother as helpless and ignorant of life and its cares as the gay, light-hearted Faith. Uriel had died without warning or preparation ; but, years ago, he had willed all he possessed to Rachel and her daughter. With care and economy it was enough to keep them in comfort, but in such thriftless hands the modest sum of Uriel's fortune would soon disappear. It was not long before Rachel became aware of this fact, and also of one still more appalling. Her delicately strung organism had suffered so severe a shock in the old man's death, that her health failed rapidly. She knew that her tenure on life was painfully slender, and anxiety for Faith's future only aggravated her condition.

It was thus with them when Rachel received one of the Florida papers, which she took regularly. Often for months together they brought her no more than the mere casual mention of Mr. Croft's name among the current items of local reports ; but to her this was life.

With the usual eager tremulousness she tore off the wrapper, addressed to Uriel as formerly, and sought through the columns for the beloved name. It met her hungry gaze in the following paragraph :

“On the morning of the 20th this community was both startled and pleased by the announcement of a marriage ceremony, performed in the Church of —, between a distinguished citizen, Mr. Mathew Croft, and the lovely and gifted heiress of Lucerne, Miss Leda Morgan, whose wonderful charms are ‘beyond compare.’ It is rumored

that the engagement was one of long standing, as Mr. Croft has been for years the friend and legal adviser of the bride's mother. The lonely condition in which Mrs. Morgan's recent death left the young lady, reasonably accounts for the suddenness of the nuptials. The bridal pair will reside at the beautiful country seat of Lucerne, in the vicinity of this city."

Rachel read the paragraph through, though each word of it seemed to transfix her soul anew in a trance of horror. Her wasted fingers clutched the paper in a cold and rigid grasp; her gaze staid fastened on the page as if unable to stir from it, while all the life in her pale face gathered into a dull red flame that leaped up into the great black orbs, making them glare like the eyes of a wounded tigress at bay.

All these weary years had she hushed her pain and buried her life in obscurity, and prayed and yearned for this man's happiness while her own heart starved, only that she might furnish him the means to fill her place with a woman whom he could love as wildly as she had loved him.

And here was her reward!

At last the demon of revenge, so long stifled by the angel of constancy, broke from its leash and possessed the woman, mind and soul.

In the wild and fierce reaction, the hate wherewith she hated him [was greater than the love wherewith she had loved him.

There is no horrid fiend in Hades more rapacious than an injured and insulted wife's jealousy toward a beautiful woman who, ignorantly or otherwise, fills the place from which she has been cast forth in loathing.

Never before had poor Rachel been so keenly and terribly aware of her unloveliness and deficiency in all feminine charms as now, when her frenzied thought pictured a ravishing woman securing the passionate love of that man, whose coldest caress had made earth a heaven for her craving heart.

Chaos usurped the empire where patient love and loyal devotion so long had reigned. All that was left in her of life or feeling concentrated in the fell resolve to blight and blast the future of those two, whose lives her slavish constancy had joined.

Hours after, when Faith returned, late in the evening, from a ramble along the shore, she found her mother gone. Old Maum Amy, now almost sunk in decrepitude, informed the girl that her mother had been obliged to go away for two or three days, but desired that Faith should remain tranquil with her faithful nurse until she returned.

Thus it came to pass that Rachel Croft had appeared, like a spirit of evil omen, to the newly-wedded pair, in the manner we have already seen.

Standing before them in the grim, calm potency of her baleful mission to them, she had related substantially what is here recorded.

She closed her story with these words :

“And now, Mathew Croft, you behold in the woman who would have died a thousand deaths to save you from harm or sorrow, the future scourge—not of your crime of murder, but that, to her, far baser sin of infidelity to the memory of the wife whose fortune and whose life fulfilled the dreams of your ambition. Having rid yourself of her despised presence, you might at least have respected her idolatrous devotion too much to sin against it thus.”

By this time Croft had gathered his faculties together sufficiently to attempt a denial of the awful charge, which had caused Leda to shrink away from his side with fear and loathing unspeakable. With all the cold insolence at his command, he said :

“Madam, I think that we have listened to the ravings of a maniac quite long enough. I know not who you are or whence you came ; but I do know that you are hopelessly mad. If you have method enough to take yourself away as you came, in God’s name, do it ; if not, I shall be forced to the disagreeable necessity of handing you over to the police as a fit subject for the insane asylum.”

“Ha ! ha ! ha ! Even *you* dare not attempt so black a villainy, unless you are prepared to have the indisputable proofs of your crime published to the world, and your beautiful young consort shown to society as an adulteress, bought with the price of your deadly sin. You do not suppose that I came here merely to tell my story and depart, do you?”

“What, then, have you come for?”

“To set your life as wide apart from this fair woman as you set mine from yours. To put a barrier, more deep and ghastly than the grave, between you, and to compel you both to make the future of *my child!*”

“What can you mean?” cried Croft, the cold sweat gathering on his brow, and the pallor of a great fear on his face.

“I mean this: to hold you twain together in the unhallowed bonds of an unlawful union, and to make you the instruments of securing to my daughter the place and privileges in society that are her dues. Henceforth, you, Mathew Croft, are only the custodian of *my* fortune, in trust for *my* child; and you, madam, the medium through whom she shall enter and adorn the bright world of which you have been a queen. Fail, either of you, in the faithful and punctilious discharge of these offices, and reap the consequences in instant exposure and ruin.”

“How dare you utter such commands to *me*, madam, whatever right you may have to govern the conduct of this man!” exclaimed Leda, with proud disdain.

“Disobey those commands, if you like better to take the scoffs of your world, as the dupe of a murderer and bigamist. The alternative is simple enough.”

Rachel's tone was so quiet and so intensely controlled, that it awed them both into silence.

At length Croft said, falteringly:

“What do you require?”

“That you shall immediately fetch your daughter and mine to this elegant home, as its heiress and mistress; that she be so received and respected by both of you; that she never learn the dreadful story of her mother’s wrongs; and that you make her life one long holiday of pleasure, until one worthier to guide and guard it shall join her heart and hand, together with *my* fortune, which shall be at once settled on her, in her own right, and uncontrolled by any prohibitions or conditions.

“On these terms I will retire into an oblivion profound as that which has so long infolded my life. Not even my child shall know that I live; but with sleepless eyes of love and vengeance will I watch and guard her fate from my hiding-place.

“Once I longed for death, and expected it; but now I feel that I shall live to fulfill this mission to *you*, and to her future. In the instant that you shall violate a single clause in these conditions, I shall emerge from the depths of my seclusion, and bring down the doom that I have power to inflict or to withhold.

“I wait your answer.”

She had seemed to rise and expand with each utterance of her suppressed passion, until now she stood above them towering and stern as the Angel of Retribution, whose task she had essayed. The glitter of her midnight eye flashed over them, baleful as a red comet’s light, and they cowered and shrank from her, awed by the mystical forces that they felt emanating from that slender, shadowy

figure, from which all the grossness and mortality had been worn by long suffering.

What she had said, they felt she was fully prepared and competent to perform, and that no human power could turn her from her resolve. From first to last, Leda had felt an invincible conviction of the truth of Rachel's ghastly story; and the aversion which had been increasing toward her husband every hour since that in which she gave him her hand in betrothal, now assumed a violence of loathing and detestation, mingled with fear, that grew out upon her face so vividly as to leave Rachel no apprehensions on the score of the future relations between this couple, that she thus chained together by a refinement of cruelty, and whom she would drive before her will to the execution of her designs as a plowman drives his yoked cattle.

No response to her demand came from their dumb lips; they were too spelled by terror to speak.

The hush was broken by the sound of a man's tread upon the gravel walk.

Simultaneously they turned to look upon the new-comer.

A low moan of anguish and despair burst from Leda's lips, for there before her on the threshold stood Gordon Warren!

CHAPTER IX.

MR. CROFT'S WARD.

"Excuse us a few moments, Warren," said Mr. Croft, as he rose, and, with great embarrassment, greeted his junior partner, to whom he made a confused motion of conducting him within the house.

Warren had fixed a steadfast gaze full of the coldest contempt upon the shivering Leda, and from her his rapid glance flashed over the other two. He saw at once that he had made a most untimely intrusion upon a scene full of agitating interest to the three persons engaged in it.

In reply to Mr. Croft, he said, quietly :

"Do not let me interrupt you, sir. I will retire to the lake until your present business is dispatched. I bring information of much moment to our interests, and, not knowing when you might come to the office, I thought it best to call upon you here without delay."

"Quite right, my dear fellow; and I shall be very shortly at leisure. Meantime, if you don't mind having a cigar in the lime grove by the water, I'll join you there directly."

This colloquy had taken place at the archway over the steps of the piazza, where Mr. Croft had met and halted

his visitor. He seemed oblivious to the fact that he had not permitted Warren to acknowledge the presence of the ladies, or to speak to his wife; yet he must have observed the keen, direct look that the young man sent into Leda's face. She, meanwhile, sat helplessly staring at him in a bewilderment of shame, and pain, and horror, at the enormity of her own involvement in the dark meshes of these other lives.

"I will wait for you in the grove with pleasure, sir, but you will first allow me to offer my *congratulations* to Mrs. Croft, my felicitations to you both."

With these words he stepped past Mr. Croft, and lightly crossed the intervening space until he stood immediately before Leda, with his fine, shapely hand extended for hers. His face was hard and cold as it was possible for flesh to be, and the clear, white light from his unflinching eye gave a more intense power to features at all times too stern.

As Leda placed her reluctant fingers on Warren's cool palm all her white face turned scarlet, and she shook with emotion so violent that Warren hastened to release her hand. With a formal bow to the silent figure in black crepe that stood curiously watching the face of Leda and the visitor, he retired from the piazza, and, at a leisurely gait, took his way to the lake-side.

"Will you have the goodness to walk into the library?" said Croft to the two women.

"I will have nothing further to say or do with this per-

son," answered Leda, haughtily, and she swept past Rachel into the hall on to her own room.

"Will you follow me?" asked Croft of the motionless woman, who had not shown a sign of life from beginning to end of this scene, except in the swift, bird-like shifting of her glance from one countenance to the other.

Still silent, Rachel followed Croft into the library. He fastened the door securely, and remained in conversation with Rachel during the space of an hour; after which she came out, and, re-entering the vestibule of the hall, desired Croft to take her through the entire building. She said:

"I wish to become familiar with the future home and surroundings of *our* child."

He winced painfully as she pronounced the word "*our*." She had emphasized it pointedly. He made no demur, but conducted Rachel through all the chambers, not excepting the one in which Leda had shut herself.

"By what right do you intrude upon me?" exclaimed Leda, angrily, as Croft held open her door for Rachel's survey of the apartment.

Croft went up to her and whispered a sentence in her ear, at which Leda shuddered and grew silent, while Rachel calmly scrutinized every portion of the luxurious chamber that had been freshly and extravagantly refitted in honor of the bridal occasion to which it was devoted. Rachel remembered with an insufferable pang of jealous rage that no such compliment had been paid to her own

nuptials, and that it was *her* fortune which had been laid at this beautiful woman's feet. She cast one long look upon Leda, who lay upon a richly-carved couch lined with primrose satin. There was that in Rachel's eye which seemed as though it could sear and scorch the soft, voluptuous beauty till it should be shriveled as a leaf that has passed through flame. Leda shrank from that malignant ray of fiery hate, as if in reality it burned her, and her recoiling from it seemed to please Rachel, for her stiff white lips parted in a phantom smile more ghastly than can be described.

"I desire that my daughter shall occupy *this room*," said Rachel, with an imperious decisiveness. "Do you understand?" she added, seeing that Croft glanced at Leda, making no reply.

He bowed his head in assent.

Rachel then moved on down the stairway, and passed directly to the hall door, where she paused a moment to say:

"You will lose no time about removing our daughter at once to this place according to the understanding we have had, always remembering that if any *accident* happens to her, or to me, the information and proofs necessary to convict you of two crimes—murder and bigamy—are lodged in hands that will be swift and sure in bringing you to justice."

Croft turned paler yet at her ominous threat, and simply bent his head.

Rachel went slowly away from the house, and walked back to the city, a dreary and dismal black shadow moving through the sunlight.

* * * * *

Some weeks have elapsed since the honey-moon of the bridal pair at Lucerne was so suddenly eclipsed by the untimely apparition of the other wife.

Very marked changes have been wrought in the household at Lucerne.

The upper circle of society in ——— have been summoned to welcome within its charmed orbit a new star—Miss Hilary, whom Mr. Croft presents to Madam Grundy as his ward.

All that Faith knows concerning the change in her fortunes is that directly after her mother's departure Eastward a strange gentleman came to her, bringing a letter from her mother, commanding her to place herself with confidence under the protection and charge of Mr. Croft, whom she had appointed Faith's guardian, and with whom Faith would reside in future, or, at least, during her mother's absence in Europe, whither, Rachel stated, that she had gone for the restoration of her health at the German baths.

Strange as such a proceeding would have seemed in an average mother, it scarcely astonished Faith, who had a life-long acquaintance with the eccentricities of her mother's singular and moody character.

Uriel had accustomed the girl to pay little heed to

Rachel's long spells of depression and reticence, always attributing them to the ill-health which was only too apparent in her.

Faith was instructed to take her old nurse with her to Florida, and to make herself quite happy in her new home, where she would receive regular tidings of her mother.

In the fresh young nature of the girl there was a wonderful elasticity and adaptability that rendered it easy for her to accept any changes or chances of life with a graceful acquiescence. Therefore, the transition from her humble home and common surroundings caused no serious shock in Faith's life. The beautiful new home, the atmosphere of culture and elegance, the regal beauty and patrician air of her guardian's young wife, which met her in Florida, seemed only the fulfillment of some day-dream born of a fairy legend.

When she first lay down to sleep in the lovely primrose chamber, she felt as if it *must* be only a vision that the morning would dispel. But, as day by day dawned on her healthful slumbers through the roseate mist of filmy draperies, she grew to feel at ease and quite familiar with her changed condition.

A governess and music-masters had been employed to take Miss Hilary's education in hand. Faith's mental training had been as irregular as her social. Uriel had instructed her in a thousand things that young girls are not expected to understand, but left her deplorably igno-

rant of those branches of learning in which society demands that a young lady shall be accomplished.

But, being only sixteen, with a bright, receptive mind and ready comprehension, it promised to be no difficult task to amend the errors in Miss Hilary's early education.

What did puzzle Faith far more than foreign verbs or studies in music and drawing, was her anomalous position in the family at Lucerne. Received as she had been with distinguished consideration, assigned the best apartments in the establishment, and generally deferred to as a person of importance, she nevertheless felt conscious of a complete alienation from the sympathies of the master and mistress of Lucerne. They were scrupulously but coldly polite and attentive to her, though always constrained and distant. But she seemed not to wonder at this fact, seeing how utterly cold they were to each other.

Mr. and Mrs. Croft seemed never to meet nor speak to each other save at the times of formal reunion in the drawing-rooms or at meals, and then only in the most ceremonious manner possible.

Mr. Croft was most of the time absent at his office in the city, and when at home he appeared always absorbed and distraught, or painfully reserved.

Mrs. Croft was proud, silent, haughty, and often contemptuous toward every one about her save Faith, and to her never more than frigidly polite. The slaves evidently stood in awe of both master and mistress.

Faith soon came to feel that the air of Lucerne was strangely chill and ungenial, and sometimes she fancied it full of mystery.

The governess was a more cheerful feature in the *menage*. She was a sprightly and alert little New England woman, with very thrifty, cheery ways, and a friendly disposition that always met one half way. Faith soon became much attached to Miss Draper, who was her constant companion.

One other member of the household oppressed the girl singularly. This was the housekeeper.

Mrs. Foster was a tall, slim creature, with the blackest of hair over the palest of brows. Her features were as expressionless as if they had been carved in chalk. She wore dark-green spectacles like goggles, that fitted close round her eyes, which, she said, could not endure either light or air. Also she wore across her brow a wide, green silk shade, that fell like a mask over the upper part of her face; and, whenever she emerged from the dim light of her own room, she was sure to throw a veil over her head and face, because of a peculiar sensitiveness of her skin to the action of light and air.

Add to these eccentric costumes a taciturnity that amounted to moroseness—a reluctance to answer the simplest question—an absolute avoidance of all companionship—and we have a pretty accurate description of the housekeeper at Lucerne. She was of a piece with the general exceptionalness of the whole establishment.

Mrs. Foster was seldom seen to exchange a word with her employers; the servants stood in wholesome dread of her, though she never seemed in any way harsh with them, only her grim, silent ways frightened them.

Toward Faith, the housekeeper manifested the same passive repulsion with which she chilled off every one about her. It was seldom that their paths touched at all.

"What do you think ails Mrs. Foster?" inquired Faith of her governess, as they were saying good-night.

"Screw loose here, I would say," replied Miss Draper, touching her forehead significantly.

"Poor soul! Do you know that I have the queerest feeling whenever I see her? I fancy that she has some dark and terrible sorrow. I would like to be kind to her, and try to comfort her, but she seems to shrink away from notice, as if it hurt her physically."

"Go to sleep, my dear, and let Mrs. Foster and her queer ways alone," said Alice Draper, as she kissed her lovely pupil's brow, and left her to her repose.

Hours later, as the midnight moon shed its pale radiance through the light draperies about Faith Hilary's couch, a slender, dark figure bent above the girl's fair head, a wan hand softly touched the rich clusters of curls that flowed over the pillow, and, moving noiselessly in her sleep, Faith reached up her bare, snowy arms as to some figure in her dreams, murmuring, softly and lovingly:

"Mother!"

CHAPTER X.

GORDON WARREN'S PUPIL.

Mrs. Croft's deep mourning for her mother rendered anything like participation in general society quite out of taste, but in consideration of his ward, Mr. Croft insisted on entertaining in a quiet way.

Not unfrequently small companies of the city folks dined or supped at Lucerne, and, unconsciously to herself, Faith Hilary was becoming a feature in the social world of —.

Chief among the habitués of Lucerne was Mr. Croft's partner, Mr. Warren. To him Faith's guardian had intrusted the care of the girl's equestrian exercises.

"Every young woman should ride well," Mr. Croft had said some month's after Faith's arrival; "and as I haven't the time to teach you, my dear, I will put you in charge of the best horseman and most prudent instructor that I know of anywhere. Mr. Warren will make you a fearless rider, without permitting you to take any risks, as a less autocratic rider might do."

"Oh, you are quite right in terming him 'autocratic,'" laughed Faith, as she turned her sunny face to the grave countenance of her appointed master of horse. "He never lets any one have a will of their own within his

jurisdiction. He has been teaching me to row on the lake, and I've learned how implacable he is."

"It is necessary to be that with one so utterly ignorant and careless of danger as yourself, Miss Hilary," replied Warren, with an amused expression, as his quiet eye glanced over the slight, girlish form, and lingered half patronizingly on her sweet, candid face, where every feeling of her free heart played fearlessly.

"Somehow it is hard to fancy that any danger can exist where you are, Mr. Warren, you seem so entirely equal to everything."

"There's a most unequivocal tribute to your conceit, Gordon," said Mr. Croft.

"Indeed I did not intend to convey the idea that *he* thinks himself so all-sufficient, but that he appears so to other people," protested Faith, flushing brightly at the implication attributed to her remark.

"Have no fear that I shall misinterpret your kind words, Miss Hilary; nor does your guardian, but he wants you to take some lessons in repartee. You are far too honest and sincere for a society belle, and we must teach you how to say what you *don't* mean, and to disguise what you *do* mean."

"For shame!" cried Faith, ruefully. "You are not in earnest about that, I know."

"Ask Mrs. Croft if I have not stated the proposition most exactly," said Warren, with his half-cynical smile, as

he lifted a straight, challenging look to Leda, who sat by listening, but taking no part in the talk.

"Is that what society demands of women, Mrs. Croft?" inquired Faith, timidly raising her glance to the proud, reserved face of her guardian's wife.

"It is what society renders *necessary* for women, Miss Hilary."

Leda's tone was biting and cold, but there was a flash of strong feeling in her eyes as she returned Warren's glance.

"Then I'd much rather not go into society if one must learn to be untrue. But I cannot see why falseness is ever necessary."

"Nor do I think that *you* will ever find it so. To paraphrase an old proverb, 'to the *true* all things are *true*.' And you must not take my jest so seriously," said Warren, who felt condemned for having provoked such remarks in the presence of Faith.

It was as if he had flung something impure into the waters of a translucent fountain, and he despised himself for having used the girl's guileless words as a means of giving Leda a thrust.

As he uttered the last sentence he rose and crossed the room to where Faith sat before a table, touching up a little drawing in her sketch-book.

He leaned over the back of her chair, and saw that she was finishing a sketch of a bit of scenery near the lake where she had passed the previous afternoon with him in

the boat, which was moored at the foot of the knoll she had drawn.

"Why did you copy that spot? There's nothing striking in it, I think," said Warren, still bending over her head.

"No," she answered, without pausing in her work. "Nothing striking, as you say, in the spot itself, but one likes to keep mementoes of places where one has been happy."

She spoke with the sublime *naivete* of a young child.

A tender half smile lit up Warren's serene face; he leaned yet a little nearer to the drooped head "rippling over" with soft, dark curls, and asked, gently:

"Were you happy there?"

"Oh, yes, very; how could I help it? The evening was so infinitely sweet and lovely, and you were telling me of so many grand and beautiful things."

"Children are easily made happy," said Warren, laughing softly—he meant it to tease her, but Faith answered quite demurely:

"That is true; but I think even a grown person would have enjoyed last evening as much as I did."

"Then you do not consider yourself a grown person?"

"How can I when I'm only sixteen?"

Warren laughed again, and said:

"Well, suppose you put down the pencil and come out for another short pull across the lake? The twilight will last long enough for that."

"How charming! Of course I will come!" she cried, joyously, and, pushing away her drawing, she ran out to get her wraps.

Warren turned himself so as to have a full look at Leda, whose gaze he had felt burning through the air during his low converse with the girl. Mrs. Croft's face was a curious study at the moment that his eyes rested on it. She still held her book up, but her glance swept over the page to read far different characters than its printed lines. The beautiful soft curves of her mouth had become set in tense lines, and a passionate gleam darkened the luster of her dilating eyes. As his look met hers her face became violently suffused, and she turned it abruptly from him toward the window by which she was seated. He went out of the room, leaving the husband and wife to a *tete-a-tete*—if they pleased. After a space of silence Mr. Croft dropped his magazine, and said, sardonically:

"Are you planning a match for these two, Leda?"

"What on earth put such an idea into your head?" exclaimed Mrs. Croft, with an almost savage surprise.

"Only the fact of your having him out here so constantly. It wouldn't be a bad idea either; the sooner we are rid of the girl the better, I should say."

"I hope you don't imagine that I shall concern myself in the least about her, whether she stays or goes? She is a subject of profound indifference to me."

"It is more than she appears to be to our young friend, Warren."

"How absurd to think he could feel the slightest interest in a crude, immature thing like that!" said Leda, contemptuously, returning to her book.

"I don't see why, I'm sure. The child is a rare bit of femininity, and bright withal. It is true Warren is old beyond his years, and richly cultured for a self-made man, but it is very common for men of distinguished talent to prefer child-like women. Then, as he is poor, Faith's prospects may stimulate his interest in her personal charms."

Leda made no answer, but read on in silence, for Mr. Croft dropped the subject and left the room.

There is nothing more harassing to one's soul than to have another person frame with speech a fear or a doubt that one has been trying to argue away from one's mind.

It was thus with Leda, who experienced a feeling of fierce resentment toward Mr. Croft for having uttered the very idea that had just set her own brain in a flame of jealous apprehension.

Croft had only stated a simple fact when he ascribed Gordon Warren's constant presence at Lucerne to Leda's insistence.

It is true she had the grace to include some others of their visitors in her invitations, but she managed to have Warren accept them oftener than any one else, and Warren's professional association with the master of Lucerne made his intimacy at the house a matter of course.

Leda was perfectly aware of Mr. Croft's ignorance of any previous relations between herself and his partner, and Faith's position at Lucerne gave her ample excuse for drawing her former victim once more within her snares. Her hope of achieving this purpose was flattered into confidence by Warren's ready acceptance of the position offered him as a friend of the family.

Not a word had ever been exchanged between them in reference to the past; and the young man seemed utterly to ignore his previous acquaintance with her—maintaining always the courteous demeanor which his relations with her husband required, but never, by word or sign, manifesting a wish to pass the bounds of simple politeness. Yet, on occasions like the one just described, Warren would fling a barbed arrow into Leda's soul, that she knew well had been steeped in some poisoned remembrance.

What the precise nature of his present sentiments toward her were, she could not divine; but her woman's vanity preferred to construe his frigid reserve into wounded love, or at least the rancor of disappointed passion. Nor could she bring herself to believe that her beauty's sway over his fervid nature, whose depths she had once stirred so powerfully, was ended.

On the contrary, she fancied that his avoidance was but a sign of his internal strife with a hopeless passion.

It was now her purpose to convince him that her heart was still accessible, though her hand was not.

Honor had no place in her calculations, either for herself or him. She felt herself poised between two overmastering feelings—hatred for her husband, and a wild infatuation for Warren.

Besides this, her experiences since her marriage had rendered her utterly reckless with regard to the future. She felt herself involved in a tissue of calamitous possibilities that might at any moment culminate in her social ruin; and she deliberately determined on hazarding her fate upon a venture which would be no less disastrous than the perils that encompassed her, but which presented to her the prospect of at least a season of enjoyment.

Whatever came of it, she was fully resolved to win back the man she had forsaken for prudential motives.

As to Warren's purpose, it was simple enough. His true and chivalrous manhood recoiled in disgust from the cold-blooded barter which Leda had made of herself to a man whom, of all others on earth, she should have scorned, had she been aware of facts confided to him by her mother. Of course, her ignorance of these facts exonerated her from any more heinous offense than the sacrifice of her heart and her womanhood to the baseness of social vanity and worldly ambition. He guessed very accurately what arguments Croft had used to induce her to marry him with such indecent haste, and he despised her for yielding herself to them. So utterly had this contempt extinguished the flame of his former passion for her beauty, that he now abhorred the delusion which had

made him a slave to so gross an infatuation for a woman false to her own soul.

As much to prove to her his entire emancipation from her influence, as for any other reason, he frequented Lucerne, not dreaming that he incurred the risk of occupying the position of suitor to Mr. Croft's young ward; still less that Leda cherished such shameful designs upon him, which his presence near her only nourished.

To him, Faith was so much a child, so frank, so natural, that any sentimental relations with her never entered his thoughts.

Her soul, limpid as a summer brook, showed him no spots through which the glad sunlight of perfect innocence did not penetrate. Besides, there were several other men, younger and gayer, more suited to a girl's fancy in every way, who were aspirants to Faith's favor, and whose attentions seemed to please her more than his own.

Her sweet, child-like ways interested him, without doubt; but her joyous, heedless, sunny nature was too far apart from the sober calm of his own, for that intense sympathy that must form the ground-work of love. He would as soon have thought himself in love with a bird, or a flower, or a child, as with sweet little Faith Hilary.

As Warren passed out from the drawing-room into the hall, Faith met him at the foot of the stairway, all closely wrapped for the excursion on the water.

"Are you sure this flimsy white thing round your head and throat is warm enough?" asked Warren, taking up an

end of the snowy web of zephyr wool that Faith had daintily twisted, turbanwise, about her head, and gathered under her throat, so that her fresh face glowed like a pink hyacinth peeping out of a snow-bank.

"Yes, quite warm enough; you know the exercise will prevent me from feeling the chilliness of the evening. Let's hurry or we shan't have much of a row."

She tripped on before him as she spoke, her delicate arched feet glancing out from the edge of a short skirt of crimson, above which a gray serge tunic was looped.

"You give a man no chance to be dignified when he waits on you, Miss Hilary. How do you suppose a fellow of my weight and inches is to keep up with that butterfly pace of yours?"

"Well, what's the use of being so dignified when one is in quest of pleasure? Why not you run, too?"

"That would be in the last degree unprofessional and unbecoming a barrister whose aim and end is to wear the ermine some day."

"Do you think of becoming a solemn member of the judiciary?"

"Don't I look solemn enough to think of it?"

"Yes, indeed; but sometimes I fancy there is more sunshine in your heart than one catches on the surface of your nature, and I imagine there are other positions that would suit you as well as or even better than the bench."

"For instance?"

"Statesmanship. You'd be quite grand and imposing as a senator; then you have such a splendid voice for an orator—clear and full like a clarion, you know."

"That is very sweet flattery, but I'm afraid your judgment is rather fanciful."

"Flattery!" repeated Faith, stopping short in her rapid walk, and looking up into Warren's eyes reproachfully. "Flattery means empty compliment or insincere speech. Do you think I'd be guilty of either?"

"No, honestly I do not; but you can be mistaken."

"What is there to be mistaken about? I have eyes to see, and ears to hear."

"Yes, of course; but we judge of what we see and hear more by our prejudices than the actual value of the subjects under analysis."

"You mean to say that because I like you, I think you have a grand presence and a beautiful will, and that if I did not like you I should be of a contrary opinion?"

"Well, almost that."

"What a mindless little creature you must think me!" said Faith, walking on with a musing, dejected air that was wholly absurd because so unaffected.

Warren laughed outright—he seldom laughed to be heard, and, when he did, the air vibrated for some distance round him, as to a sonorous peal of bells. Waves of that melodious gamut of sounds reached Leda's ear where she sat watching Warren and Faith go down the lime walk to the lake.

"He must be very happy to laugh like that," she thought.

And happiness, under existing circumstances, was the very last condition that she expected or desired for Gordon Warren. She felt bitterly angered against him for being able to laugh, and enraged with Faith for provoking it.

"What can he see to amuse him in that silly gosling of a girl?" she said, under her breath.

After a few moments she went to her chamber to dress for dinner.

Some people from the city were expected to pass the evening at Lucerne.

An hour later Warren and Faith came up from the lake, talking as gayly as on their way thither. On re-entering the house, Warren stopped in the dark library to light a cigar, while Faith went on up stairs to make her toilet.

Standing at the window on the piazza, Warren perceived a tall, black figure glide out from the lime walk by which he had just returned. This person hurried along the edge of the open lawn, and entered the garden by the side way that approached the house obliquely, and wound under the library windows. Shifting his stand to a side window, Warren watched the stealthily moving figure till it passed just beneath him; he saw that it was the eccentric house-keeper, Mrs. Foster.

CHAPTER XI.

SPINNING A WEB.

Leda was not a woman who could rest passive under a condition of things that threatened to set at naught her most passionate feelings and thwart her secret desires.

Nor was she blind to the fact that a fresh, bright, true-hearted creature like Faith Hilary—the very antithesis of her own character—was precisely the person to appeal to the nobler sentiments of a man with Gordon Warren's innate love for truth and purity, in the same measure as her own voluptuous fascinations had enthralled his sensuous being.

She knew instinctively that in the moment when those finer chords were struck in Warren's soul, their music would forever silence the siren notes to which his senses had listened a little while ago.

Too wise to attempt any overt or direct interposition of obstacles to the growing intimacy between them, she nevertheless determined that a prompt barrier should arise to set Warren and Faith apart effectually.

Such women as Leda Croft are born with a subtle genius for strategy. It is part of their wonderful power over others that they divine situations and execute movements by intuitions almost unerring.

A week later a party of guests were invited to dine at Lucerne, in honor of the arrival of one of Mrs. Croft's relatives—Mr. Julian Vernois—a very distinguished-looking but rather *blase* man of thirty-five, who enjoyed a somewhat equivocal reputation in the gay circles of the Crescent City, of which he was a native. The social position of this wealthy and high-born creole was the only unquestionable feature connected with his history.

To this gentleman's escort Faith Hilary was assigned by the hostess when dinner was announced.

Leda appropriated the arm of her husband's partner.

"I wonder that you are willing to expose your lovely young ward to the attractions of so dangerous a flirt as Mr. Vernois," said the lady who occupied the seat next Warren, on Mrs. Croft's right hand at table.

Leda raised her superb shoulders in accompaniment to the sarcastic smile that played on her face, as she replied :

"You cannot imagine, Mrs. Dalton, that Julian Vernois would engage in a flirtation with an insipid girl like that—a mere child! Remember, he has served his apprenticeship in Paris and at Baden."

"Oh, very true; but these lady-killers are omnivorous creatures—'all's fish that comes to their net!'"

"There you are mistaken, my dear friend. One must be somewhat accomplished in the art of flirtation to engage the interest of such men as Julian."

"In that case, madam, I would say that Mr. Vernois need not lack 'foeman worthy of his steel' in *your* vicinity."

It was Warren who uttered the last remark, in a low significant tone, as Mrs. Dalton turned to answer a question from her other neighbor.

A deep flush suffused the soft peach-bloom of Leda's beauty, and she said, gently :

"You are severe, and therein unjust to me. If you but knew the truth—the dreadful, bitter truth—that underlies the seeming falseness——"

She halted abruptly. Her lip was quivering, and she seemed about to lose her self-command utterly.

Warren hastened to say :

"I pray you say no more, madam. I confess my fault in provoking the retrospective. What is done is done, and the past is worse than nothing to either of us."

Immediately addressing his attention to the other lady beside him, Warren left Mrs. Croft to the opposite man on her left, and the dinner passed without further incident worthy of being recorded.

Nevertheless, Leda's allusion to that fiery epoch whose flame had seared through his being, and whose heat still smoldered at his heart, awoke strange sensations in Warren's breast.

Deep as was the contempt he felt for the woman who could wed one man for mercenary advantage, with her heart inflamed by passion for another, there yet lingered with him a certain feverish pain in remembering the enchanted days when his soul lay at her feet and pulsed in her hand if it but touched his own.

Though he had turned coldly from her, and was apparently engrossed in conversation with Mrs. Dalton—a gay little society woman—Warren’s glance reverted furtively to the beautiful face that had lain for one delirious moment on his breast.

Perhaps it was the recollection of that moment that called a fervid flush to his brow, as he withdrew his eyes from Leda’s averted face to answer some commonplace remark of Mrs. Dalton. Or was it the undertone of keen suffering that he divined through the smiling mask that Leda wore for the world’s eyes?

He fancied to-night, for the first time since the day he saluted her as Mathew Croft’s bride, that the soft outlines of her beauty had sharpened a trifle, and that the feverish light in her eyes seemed more like the glow of fierce pain than the radiance of pleasure. Then her tone had been thrilled through with a keen agony when she uttered that passionate reference to the past.

With the sensitive chivalry of a large-hearted man, to whom the sins and the sorrows of womanhood ever appeal with irresistible pathos, Warren began to feel that perhaps he had judged Leda too hastily, and that it might be, as she intimated, that some invincible force of which he had not guessed may have been urged upon the girl to drive her to this hasty marriage.

In the midst of such disturbing fancies as these, he succeeded in sustaining a disjointed conversation with those immediately around him until all the formalities

of the meal were over, and the ladies had left the dining-room.

Declining to participate in the protracted libations of his host and the other gentlemen, Warren lit a cigar and went out alone upon the terrace to smoke it. The wonderful luster of the southern stars rendered the moonless night so softly clear that the glitter of dew-drops and the gleam of the orange blossoms shone through the darkness, as Warren passed along the grassy slope that edged the building, making his way to an arbor, covered with yellow jasmine vines already in full bloom, and distilling their rich perfume from the golden bells that swung dreamily in the light breeze.

There were rustic garden chairs in the arbor, and here Warren seated himself. Through the opening under the vine-wreathed archway he could see a light from the window of the room which Mrs. Morgan had occupied during her last illness.

The hours he had passed beside the pale sufferer came vividly back to his thoughts, and he remembered with a remorseful pain how he had lately ignored his promise to the dying woman—that he would be ever a tender and considerate friend to her child. Beyond this memory rose the strange confession of the widow concerning him who was now the rightful guardian of her child's life.

A tangled skein of destiny, truly, seemed the tissue of circumstances in which Gordon Warren found himself meshed. Amid such troubled reflections the time passed

until his cigar had burned away to the stubby end that he now cast from his fingers out among the violets that bordered the alcove.

The sound of music and laughter came to him from the drawing-rooms, and he arose from his reclining posture on the garden bench to return to the company. A dark figure occupied the door-way of the arbor, a white face gleamed above the dense crepe draperies.

It was Leda. She did not stir from her calm pose, where she leaned one shoulder against the light-fluted column of the arbor.

"You seemed so happy that I would not speak to you until you chose to move," she said, as Warren rose and stood before her

"Have you been here long?" he asked, a little sternly.

"Yes, long, if we let propriety measure the time—ten minutes or more by the chronometer."

Her tone was a trifle mocking, but tremulous, too, as if with strong feeling suppressed.

"Allow me to take you into the drawing-rooms, madam. You should not be here."

"You must not think I came seeking you. Indeed I thought you were still in the dining-room with the others. Nevertheless, I am glad to find you here. I must speak to you some time, and this will be as good as any."

She spoke with the perfect self-possession and *savoir-voice* of a woman of the world, and moved forward as if to take her seat within the arbor.

"Pardon me, Mrs Croft, if I decline to remain here with you. I have no right to do so."

She knew him too well to resist his protest against the imprudence she had so calmly suggested. She smiled a little as she said, slipping her hand through his arm :

"I had forgotten that the dear old days were gone, and their privileges with them. Yes, you are right, we must go in."

There was something at once sad and humble in her manner of taking his reproof, and her mention of "the dear old days" made his heart beat loud. Her hand was resting somewhat heavily upon his left arm, and she seemed to be aware of the accelerated pulsations that sent the man's rich, red blood torrentwise through his healthy veins, for she, too, became tremulous, and caught her breath nervously as if to keep back a sigh.

Neither of them spoke again until they stood upon the low veranda, with the light from the lamp in the vestibule showing on them. Then Leda stopped, and, raising her eyes timidly to his, said :

"Let me speak now ; I think my heart will burst if I keep it locked any longer. See, the library is quite empty ; let us stop in there for a few moments."

There was so much of suffering and of entreaty in her look and voice that he could not bear to deny, though he shrank from compliance with the request. He said, anxiously : "What good can come of explanations or confessions now ? Silence is best."

"Maybe; but I cannot live on under the killing sense of your contempt—you may pity or hate me as you will when I have told you the truth, but I will not bear the wrong you do me now in your thoughts. I can see in your every glance that you believe me false and heartless."

He could answer nothing to this—she had correctly interpreted his thoughts. Without further resistance, he followed her into the library.

Some of the gentlemen had joined the ladies in the drawing-rooms; their mingled voices blended with the lively music of Miss Draper's *Bramra*.

Leda placed herself upon a low couch, deep in the embrasure of a broad window. Warren did not take the seat at her side, but remained standing almost in front of her, lightly leaning one arm over the tall back of a carved chair. The light from a single lamp streamed through a green glass shade, making a moonlight dimness throughout the apartment. Leda's face seemed strangely pallid in this wan half-light. It was a story to touch the keenest sympathies of a strong, true heart that she told, with the painful emphasis of broken sentences and suppressed sighs.

At the close of it she said:

"You had renounced and deserted me. He showed me my dead mother's letter to him, expressing her hope and desire that I would become his wife. I was homeless and a pauper. What remained to me but this marriage? Marriage! Oh, God, no! but a detested bondage more

horrible than the chains of a galley slave. Ah! if you had not left me——”

Here her voice broke into sobs, and she buried her face in the cushions of the couch.

The situation was in the last degree perilous and painful—at any moment Mr. Croft or some one else might enter the library. Abruptly to quit her presence, after the piteous confession she had just uttered, would have seemed brutally unfeeling—to remain and prolong the discussion of a topic so dangerous, savored of treachery.

To Warren's chivalrous nature there was torture of the keenest in such an aspect of affairs.

Besides, the idea that his Quixotic renunciation of this superb creature's love had precipitated her into the abyss of misery, in which he now beheld her writhing like a gorgeous serpent in its dark cage, stung him to the core of his generous soul. He would have given his life that moment to repair the wrong he had done her through his mistaken consideration for her welfare—yet what could any act of his accomplish now more than the more serious complication of an already hopeless mistake?

He must have been less than the great-hearted man he was to forbear some attempt to assuage the strong pangs of anguish that he beheld this woman suffering, and, as he now believed, through his ill-judged act. He was very pale, and there was a solemn sincerity in his deep, low tones, as he said:

“Heaven knows how honestly I sacrificed myself for

your good when I wrote you that letter. What you term desertion on my part was unavoidable. I had no option about leaving you. I would give my heart's blood to alter or to help you bear this bitter fate."

"Would you?" she asked, eagerly, and lifting to him her beautiful face, all wet with her passionate tears.

"You cannot doubt it."

"You *can* help me bear it, and you alone—only let me feel that you do not hate and despise me for having given myself to this man whom destiny thrust upon me. Be kind to me—be my friend. Ah, if you knew my desperate need of your sustaining sympathy!"

"It is yours, and all that the most devoted friendship of a true man can confer."

"How I thank you," said Leda, softly, as she rose, and, passing her hand through his arm, led the way toward the drawing-rooms.

On reaching the hall, she motioned him to enter the parlors beyond, and a little while later she re-appeared among her guests with no other sign of her late stormy emotions on her face than a more brilliant bloom upon the delicate skin—a darker luster in her magnificent eyes.

CHAPTER XII.

A MORTAL COMBAT.

"Will you please not touch my work in that way, Mr. Vernois?"

It was Faith Hilary who thus gently rebuked the impertinence of the elegant, *blase* creole, Julian Vernois, who sat near her, languidly fingering the balls of bright Berlin wool that lay in a pretty basket on her lap.

"Certainly, if it annoys you; but how sensitive you must be to mind it."

Mr. Vernois stretched himself lazily back in the *fauteuil* that he had placed in such a position as to have his face to Faith and his back to the small company of guests who, with himself, were passing the evening at Lucerne. A sufficient period had elapsed since his first introduction to Miss Hilary for this accomplished man of the world to establish himself on a very easy and sociable footing at the villa. So equally did he divide his attentions between the beautiful mistress of Lucerne and the fair young creature, with whose exquisite sensibilities he was evidently amusing himself at this moment, that he managed to keep himself free of any imputation that could place him among Miss Hilary's special admirers.

"No; I doubt if I am particularly sensitive, but it makes me nervous to have my threads interfered with."

"Are you quite sure *that* is what you object to?" asked Vernois, his bold black eyes emitting a wicked, teasing expression, that called the swift blood to Faith's delicate cheek.

He knew perfectly that it was the freedom of the action, and the unavoidable contact of her slender, busy fingers with his intruding hand among her wools, that displeased the girl. Julian Vernois belonged to that class of social iconoclasts that make it their mission to instruct the sweet unwisdom of the innocent fledglings that modern mothers send forth, unguided, into the vortex of fashionable life, for any rude hand that wills to brush the original bloom from the delicate surface of womanhood. It gave him a fresh and intense delight to call the crimson flush to the pure, childish face of Faith Hilary—to kindle in her dreamful eyes the unrestful glow of embarrassment, by such equivocal speeches as that he had just uttered, or by dropping into the pellucid depths of her calm soul some word of fervid compliment that would stir the slumbrous waves and break the rapt repose of her untried nature.

Faith made no direct answer to his question, but said, as she lowered her face to escape the dark glow of his Eastern eyes that confused her, almost painfully:

"Why do you like to worry me by doing things that you know I dislike?"

A smile, ever so faint and fleet, crossed the soft, woman-

ish curves of Julian Vernois' beautiful mouth as he watched the slight quiver of Faith's drooped lids, and the changeful color in her sweet young face.

"How could I know you would dislike my touching your work? Moreover, I am not sure that I was conscious of doing so. I suppose I was only obeying an impulse like that which makes one lift a flower to inhale its perfume, that one sense the more may be delighted. You can understand why I should love to touch anything over which those dainty, rose-tipped fingers have moved."

There was not much besides empty compliment in the words; but, accompanied as they were by the low and tender modulation of voice that Vernois employed with such consummate art when it pleased him to throw a subtle meaning into trivial speech, they filled little Faith's guileless heart with a fluttering sensation—half of pleasure, half of embarrassment.

She moved uneasily and colored violently under the rain of fervid glances that played, like burning sunrays, over her from those practiced eyes, that had learned their occult art so well. Vernois made no effort to relieve her intense confusion, but sat watching her as a scientist might observe the effect of some curious experiment in the mixture of chemicals.

"May I have the song you promised me this evening, Miss Hilary?"

It was Gordon Warren who asked the question. He

had approached them unobserved by either, and now stood quite close to Faith's shoulder, and measuring the subtle face of Julian Vernois with his cold, quiet eye.

"Oh, yes, with much pleasure," said Faith, as she rose, with an almost eager haste, and took a long breath, as a diver does when rising out of suffocating waves. There was an expression of gratitude in the bright, trustful eyes as she turned them from the dark, languid face of the creole to Warren's grave, strong countenance.

"Wouldn't half an hour later suit you as well, sir?" asked Vernois, with cool insolence of manner, while his olive cheek flushed with resentment of the interruption to his pastime, and his fiery glance added plainly: "Don't you see that *I* am engaging Miss Hilary's attention?"

"No," answered Warren, emphasizing the sharp monosyllable with one of his cold, direct looks that implied so much decision, and, as he uttered the word, he gave his arm to Faith and led her to the piano.

Vernois followed the tall, spare form with wrathful eyes, that expressed both surprise and indignation. Such conduct on the part of a man occupying the inferior social grade of the young lawyer, seemed little short of insult to the imperious mind of Mr. Julian Vernois, who drew his lineage from the loins of Bourbon kings.

Another pair of eyes than Julian's had watched the proceeding.

Leda noticed that before interrupting the *tele-a-tete*, Warren had been intently observing Faith Hilary from

where he stood talking with another guest at the farther end of the apartment.

The moment she saw him deliberately cross to Faith's side, she felt assured he did so with the purpose to interrupt the fooling on which Vernois had made his reputation, and which was too evidently having its effect on the clear, open face of the unsophisticated girl, whom he was subjecting to the ordeal of his fascinations.

"You managed that little *coup* with infinite address," said Leda, a little later in the evening, when she found herself near Warren. "It was like you to rescue poor, simple-minded little Faith from Julian's wiles; but you must bear in mind the inevitable fate of doughty knights who become champions for distressed damsels."

"I think there's no fear that I shall get into any serious trouble on Miss Hilary's account."

"I did not mean exactly that; perhaps you will only be saving her from one peril to plunge her into another."

Leda smiled significantly as she said this, and showered the full splendor of her admiring eyes upon the impassible face of her companion.

"I do not understand," said Warren, who was utterly devoid of that personal vanity that makes a man fancy himself dangerous to the heart-peace of every woman he meets.

"You know that in the legends the rescued lady invariably bestows her favor upon the cavalier who wields his lance in her cause."

"No fear of so romantic a denouement in this instance," he replied, as his eyes wandered to where Faith sat, gayly bandying words with two or three young gentlemen. "She could never think of me in any other aspect than friend, mentor, or brother."

"You should know better than to encourage such incredulity; similar things happen so constantly. Unless you are prepared to marry Mr. Croft's ward, and carry off the beautiful young heiress from all the other fortune-hunters, I think you are unwise to interfere with the attentions of men who would be eligible partners for her."

In her keen anxiety to sting Warren's sensitive pride to the point of withdrawing his interest entirely from the girl, whose fortune rendered her a prize for competitors with mercenary motives, she had aimed her stroke too close to the vital spot in his character.

In a tone of bitter contempt, he said:

"You, madam, are the last person alive who should think me capable of interfering with a woman's social prospects. Miss Hilary is as sacred from matrimonial designs on my part as if she were my own sister."

Almost immediately after this he took his leave.

Crossing the sward beyond the shrubbery, he entered the deeply embowered arcade of the drive that led toward the city, and there, standing beneath one of the huge oaks in a languid attitude, with a cigar between his lips, he perceived the elegant person of Julian Vernois. With an indolent gesture, and not changing his posture, Vernois said:

"I suppose, sir, you will have no objection to explaining the very remarkable conduct of which you were guilty toward me this evening?"

Warren had stopped within an arm's length of his interlocutor, who concluded his question by taking the cigar from his lips and puffing a cloud of smoke into the star-lit air.

"I am unaware of anything specially remarkable in my manner where you were concerned, but you are welcome to put your own construction on any act of mine."

Warren's tone was a trifle contemptuous, as he scanned the lithe, supple form before him—slender and delicate as an Arab's, but fibrous and tense as if its tissues were of steel.

"If you are ignorant of any offense to a *gentleman* in your behavior this evening, I have only to say that your instincts on such points must be as obscure as your birth, sir."

The words were ineffably insolent, and the haughty tone of the patrician exquisite rendered them utterly unbearable to the proud manhood of Gordon Warren.

"I trust you will find nothing obscure about *this*, sir!"

With a movement altogether as light and as cool as his tone, Warren struck Vernois a blow upon the mouth that staggered him.

The delicate aristocrat knew that however he might surpass the stalwart plebeian in insolence of speech, he

was no match for him in sheer physical force. He seemed not to have counted on this turn, for his voice was utterly choked with rage as he said, almost in a whisper, but with a horrid oath:

"I shall kill you for that!"

"You will *try* to, I know, of course. I ask your pardon for the blow, which, as the stronger man, I should have refrained from giving, only that I felt constrained to furnish you another pretext for a quarrel than the one you took. You understand now which of my offenses I am to settle with you in our ostensible quarrel."

"How dare you presume to instruct me on points of propriety, sir!"

"Only because a man who can insult a lady with falsehood and frivolity is not apt to be too careful how he uses his opportunities of injuring her by other means."

Of course there could be but one mode of concluding an interview of this character between two Southern gentlemen. After a few more words, they separated for the night.

At dawn of the following morning these two men stood calmly fronting each other in the gray shadows, upon a lonely strip of sward by the river, just one mile from the city. Each clasped a loaded revolver, and the cold gleam of the deadly weapons was not more ominous than the light that flashed from Julian Vernois' black orbs as they met the steadfast, level gaze of his antagonist. They had cast lots to decide which should give the signal to fire.

Calculating probabilities by ordinary rules, there were fearful odds against the calm, towering form of the young lawyer, who was utterly unskilled in the use of weapons, while he was perfectly aware that the man before him bore an established reputation as a "dead shot," who had left more than one *duello* with blood-stains upon his conscience.

It was Gordon Warren's clear, incisive tone that clave the cold, crisp air with the one word:

"Fire!"

CHAPTER XIII.

THE PLOTTERS.

Two pistol-shots rang simultaneously out through the still solitude, and a moment after Gordon Warren sank down upon the turf, a crimson stream oozing from his breast through the immaculate linen bosom of his shirt.

"Dead, by Jove!" exclaimed Vernois, in a low, horror-struck tone, as he strode to where his opponent lay, pallid and breathless, with his corpse-like face upturned to the white dawn sky.

With trembling hand, he opened the garments that covered the wound he had made, and then turned away, shuddering, and as pale as the senseless man by whom he knelt.

In a minute more he was spurring his horse, the fleetest in the Lucerne stables, toward the city at lightning speed, and, with all possible dispatch, procured a surgeon and a carriage, with which he returned to the place of the *rencontre*.

"Still alive, but I wouldn't give a dime for his chance of recovery," said the young surgeon, after his examination of the wound. And then, with significant earnestness, he added, locking full in Vernois' eyes: "And still less for your chance of life if he dies. He's wonderfully beloved by the lower classes here, and they'd take the law into their own hands to avenge his death. Take my advice and get away as fast as you can."

"Thank you; but you don't imagine I shall?"

"As you please, sir—there, carry his head a little higher—so."

They placed the unconscious form of the wounded man within the carriage, where the surgeon supported it, while Vernois remounted the driver's seat, and in due time the pale sufferer was under the doctor's roof, with the wound probed and dressed, and his consciousness restored.

On one side of him stood the surgeon, on the other the dark, hueless face of the creole bent over his pillow, as Warren's eyes unclosed from the long swoon. He looked from one to the other with a confused expression. After a little he said, feebly:

"Ah, I remember—you shot me."

This to Vernois, into whose face he was then intently gazing.

"Yes; but I swear I did not aim to hit home so close."

Warren made no answer to this, but, turning to the surgeon, said :

"Whatever happens, you will bear witness that I fell in a fair fight, and that it was I who chose to fight without seconds or witnesses, and I gave the signal to fire. In the meantime, assign any cause save the true one for my illness. I think I shall get well; if not, there will be time for disclosure after I am dead."

There was a sound strangely like a sob in Julian Vernois' throat as he turned from the bedside and walked away to the window.

Warren followed him with a compassionate look. He seemed to put himself for the moment in Vernois' place, forgetting his own disaster.

Drawing the surgeon nearer to him, he whispered, still looking at Vernois :

"Send him away—he can do no good here."

After this the wounded man closed his eyes and relapsed into a stupor.

* * * * *

"Surely you are not in earnest, Julian?"

Mrs. Croft's haughty lips curled scornfully as she put the question to her handsome cousin, who reclined at her feet on the mound of sunny turf, where they had paused in their walk along the lake-shore.

"I don't blame you for doubting it; but strange as the truth is, I swear to you that I was never so painfully in earnest in my life."

"Then I'm sorry for you. I brought you here to take the little simpleton out of my way, and not to entangle your affections with her. I can hardly credit my own senses when they assure me that *you*, Julian Vernois, are mad after a bit of pink and white womankind like Faith."

"It is precisely such a creature, nymph-like and pure, that can turn the brain of a world-worn *vivant* like your humble servant. Now you, *ma belle* Leda, could not stir a fiber of me, charm you never so wisely. I've had a surfeit of the Cleopatra type."

"Thank you for the delicate compliment. You have a novel mode of ingratiating yourself into favor, when you want my help to accomplish an almost impossible thing."

"Oh, the day is past when you and I need exchange flattering speeches, beautiful coz. Besides, the service will be mutual, after all. The little girl will remain a thorn in your side, if I take her not away. She's just the creature to fall desperately in love with your hero, Warren. As soon as he is on his legs again—which won't be long—he will resume his place here, and little Faith's eyes, filled with compassionate sympathy for the pale invalid, will play havoc with the heart you wish to hold in your toils."

"Granting the truth of all you say, Julian, what is to be done? Mr. Croft will never consent to your having his

ward, and, subtle as your influence over her is, you could never induce her to run away with you."

"No; I dare not even speak to her of love, far less of marriage. She takes fright like a timid fawn that hears the rustle of leaves, if I but approach the vital question."

"Then she is not in love with you?"

"I know it; but the power I have over her at times amounts to infatuation. Opportunity is all that I lack to carry off my prize by strategy."

"That is exactly what I cannot furnish you. Miss Draper is an Argus that cannot be evaded, unless the girl willed to dispense with her eternal *surveillance*. In my opinion you have frightened her with your evil eye, and she keeps the governess close by as a counter-charm."

"I've thought of that myself. Is there no way to win Croft over?"

"He will not even listen to the suggestion. I've done my best with him. Indeed you cannot wonder, my dear Julian, for the world says ugly things of you; and, while Croft is no saint, he dares not brave social opinion so far as to consent to a match between his immaculate young ward and a man with your reputation."

"There's too much truth in that view of the subject. But what need we care about his consent? Only help me to get possession of the girl, and the rest is simple enough."

"I dare not have any hand in such an intrigue."

"Are you afraid of your husband's resentment?"

"I am afraid of the consequences of meddling in Faith's destiny."

"Time was when nothing earthly could daunt or frighten you, Leda. You are a great coward about this girl."

"I have reason to be so. You know how joyfully I would be rid of her, but you must manage it yourself; I will not touch the business."

As she said this with decisive emphasis, Mrs. Croft rose from her seat upon the trunk of a fallen tree and turned her steps toward the house. Vernois remained stretched on the grass, seemingly oblivious of her movements.

It was now over two weeks since the encounter which had come nigh to costing Gordon Warren's life. He was pronounced to be out of danger, but still so ill that he could not leave his bed. His desperate attack was reputed to be the result of an accident, and the extent of his danger had been carefully concealed by the attending surgeon, and his mother, who was his only nurse. Meantime Julian Vernois had remained a guest at Lucerne, and, in his daily and continuous association with Faith Hilary's exquisite womanhood, had yielded himself to the fresh, pure charm of her guileless nature till pleasure in her bright, vivacious society had grown to a passionate craving for the full and entire ownership of her rare, new-blown loveliness.

It was not possible that a susceptible, impressionable girl could remain insensible to the fascinations of an accom-

plished and captivating man like Julian Vernois, especially when genuine admiration for herself gave a keener edge to the subtle flatteries in which he expressed his homage. Yet, despite the sensuous attraction that he exercised over her, there was an instinctive mistrust of him that was ever present in Faith's angelic soul, and that caused her to shrink from his amorous eyes and honeyed phrases with a feeling of absolute dread.

So long as he avoided all tender references in his talk, the girl was unfeignedly delighted with his attentions, which he knew how to invest with the thousand nameless graces that can be felt but not described. His dark, Oriental beauty of face and person must alone have had their effect upon the artistic sense of the imaginative maiden, who colored all things with the warm tones of her poetic fancy, and, in the unconscious admiration which he often saw in her candid eyes, Julian found stimulating nutriment for the new-born passion that was astir in his heart.

Leda had only spoken half the truth when she said Mr. Croft would never *consent* to Julian's marriage with his ward; but she purposely suppressed the fact that if it could be compassed *without* his consent or connivance, Mr. Croft would rejoice as much as herself to be relieved of the onerous charge of the young lady on honorable terms that would satisfy Faith's mother.

In a covert way, Leda had left nothing undone to inflame Faith's fancy for the creole, and no breath of the

scandals attaching to Mr. Vernois' character had intruded within the seclusion of Lucerne. For the rest, a less adroit man would have found ample occasion to interest an appreciative woman in the same house with him, and constantly exposed to his society, as Faith was, albeit the clever, alert little governess was never long absent from their company.

Without being in the least obtrusive, Alice Draper managed to keep within ear-shot of her young pupil whenever there seemed to be a chance for a *tete-a-tete* between Faith and the privileged guest of Mrs. Croft. So deeply and confidingly had Faith learned to love and admire the genuine, honest, and cultured woman to whom her education had been intrusted, and who was also her sole companion among the strange natures that composed the Lucerne household, that she seemed never to object to Miss Draper's participation in all her conversations, walks, or drives with the handsome creole. On the contrary, she made a point of extending to Miss Draper all the invitations with which Vernois honored her. This, of course, was to the last degree obnoxious to the imperious character of Vernois, and perhaps this impediment to unrestricted association with the girl only served to augment his fancy for her. Like all vain men who have achieved great success with women, he detested contradiction from them.

As he lay pondering the situation, with his dreamy eyes fixed on the calm, silvery waters of the lake, and his elegant person reclined on the shelving bank, the sound

of voices in speech and laughter came to him. Miss Hilary and her governess were approaching down the lime walk. An enormous Irish setter dog followed at their skirts. It was Faith's pet and playfellow, that Uriel had trained to keep the girl company in her desultory wanderings about the environs of the city of her birth, and along the bright gulf-shore where Faith loved to roam at will.

"How gay you are this morning!" called Vernois to the laughing girl, as she drew near to his resting-place.

"Yes, and for a very good reason. I sent a bouquet of hot-house flowers, with a note, to Mr. Warren, and received a reply, written with his own hand, to say that he is greatly better, and hopes soon to join us again."

"I should be willing to suffer twice as much, and as long as he has done, if my recovery could give you such pleasure."

He spoke the words lightly, and smiled; but the fire in his languid eyes burned with a darker glow as he watched the bright, changeful face that looked down on him from the shadow of Faith's broad sun-hat.

"Would you, though?"

There was more *naivete* than coquetry in the question, as she bent forward to reach a wreath of jasmine from the branches above his head. She was ineffably graceful and pretty, and bewitchingly feminine in her lithe movement, with the wide sleeves falling from the snowy roundness of her uplifted arms, and her delicate hands busy among the dark foliage of the blossoming vines.

“Let me cut them for you ; they will hurt your hands,” said Julian, who had arisen ; and, as he spoke, he took her fingers from the obstinate stem she was trying to twist from the vine, and held the little hand for a second while he detached the spray with his knife.

Careless as the action seemed, and apparently intent as he was upon gathering the flowers, Vernois was not the man to miss one shade of the quick color that rose to Faith’s cheek, nor the light, tremulous movement of the slender fingers imprisoned in his clasp.

But Faith had no dream of his consciousness, so non-chalant was his expression and his tone, as he said, loosing her hand, and winding the long wreath of golden blooms about her white straw hat :

“You might pass for a Greuze shepherdess now, with your short, bright skirts, and the crown of blossoms round your head—eh, Miss Draper?”

“I often think she should have belonged to Arcadia, and dwelt only with folks who were simple and true,” replied Alice Draper, sending the direct glance of her clear blue eyes into the half-sinister ones of her interlocutor.

The governess was so earnest a little Puritan that her face always expressed all that she felt, and Julian saw that her answer carried its covert meaning.

He laughed satirically, as he said :

“And do you imagine the Arcadians were a bit more guileless than latter-day folks? For my part, I think there’s precious little difference between the men and

women of to-day and the perfect pair that trod the daisy-starred shores of Abana and Pharpar."

"In nature, perhaps not; but in practice, I fancy that some, at least, of their descendants combine the duplicity of Adam with the subtlety of the serpent."

"From that remark it is fair to conclude that Eve's daughters have, in some instances, improved in the matter of ingenuous credulity. We should scarce have had the pretty fable of 'The Celestial Garden,' had Dame Eve possessed your wisdom, Miss Draper."

"I do believe that you two are trying to quarrel," cried Faith, opening her eyes very big, and turning their bright, ruddy light first on one and then the other of her companions. "Come, Miss Draper," she added, "let us continue our walk, and leave Mr. Vernois to vent his spite upon the animate and inanimate objects of nature, in the solitary contemplation of which we disturbed him. He may be more amiable when we meet him again."

The two ladies passed on their way, and Julian lighted a cigar and resumed his lazy pose on the velvet grass.

CHAPTER XIV.

A SISTER OF CHARITY.

"Only let me see him for five minutes, Mrs. Warren. I have asked Dr. Wise's permission, and he says there's no longer the least objection to his having brief visits from his friends. On the contrary, they will cheer and revive him."

"I will let Gordon know of your kind wish to see him, Mrs. Croft. I am sure he will be flattered, even if he should not feel strong enough to receive you to-day."

"No, no; you must not say a word of it, but let me give him a pleasant surprise. The stimulant will be good for him."

"Perhaps it may be," said the timid old woman, as she stood hesitating, half dazzled, half irresolute, in view of the high distinction conferred upon her humble roof and her darling son by the presence and insistence of this beautiful high-born lady.

"I know that it will—he has been so much with me, and we are such good friends. See, I have brought him some books, and will read to him if he likes."

Quite persuaded, the old dame led the way without further demur across the length of a somewhat spacious cottage, and, opening a door at the farther end of the

hall, looked in, and then nodded to Leda, who followed her into the small but airy chamber fitted up as a library.

For the first time since his *accident*, Gordon Warren had been removed from his bedroom in a rolling chair, and laid upon a couch in the adjoining room, which was brighter, and opened on the well-kept flower-garden of old-fashioned plants.

The warm hues of his chamber-robe, and the gay coverlid thrown over him, intensified the paleness and sharpened outlines of the massive face that lay upon a dark silken cushion.

A flush, that seemed to pain him as it rose, flamed up into Warren's cheek and brow, as he met the radiant, joyful face that Leda bent over him from the back of his couch.

"They told me you had left your room to-day, and I *could* not longer delay coming to see you."

She touched his forehead with her ungloved fingers as she spoke, and the perfume of her breath wandered, like the balm of warm south winds, over his cheek.

"You are very good, madam. Mother, won't you give Mrs. Croft that chair?"

He motioned Leda to take the chair which Mrs. Warren had just placed in front of him, a little way from his couch, and added:

"It is worth being ill to find how we are valued by our friends. There have not been hours enough in the day

for us to number the thoughtful acts of ours—have there, mother?”

“No, indeed, my boy. Thank God we have learned that your life is precious to many a good heart, since that terrible night that almost robbed me of you.”

“Let us not speak of that now, dear,” he said, gently, seeing the garrulous old lady about to enter upon a minute account of how, when, and where her son met with the accident which had come so nigh to making her childless.

His lightest word or sign was enough to render the devoted old mother subject to his will.

“Whose lovely offering is that he cherishes so close to him?” asked Leda, pointing to a small basket of geranium-blooms, with a delicate note lying in the midst of them.

“You ought to recognize those flowers, since they came from your own conservatory,” said Warren, replying to her question, and passing his hand caressingly over the bright velvet petals of the gorgeous flowers.

“From Miss Hilary, I presume.”

Despite her effort to speak sweetly, there was a ring of displeasure in her voice that made him say:

“I hope you don’t mind her having robbed your plants for me? You would not, I know, if you guessed half the delight they have given me. She has not missed sending me a bouquet one single day since my injury—dear little soul!”

Whether the tenderness of his tone roused her resentful jealousy, or that she felt reproached by Faith's delicate and constant attention for her own lack of the refined sentiment that prompted the girl to send these fragrant and lovely messengers into the sick man's darkened chamber, Leda felt her whole being flush with chagrin and mortification. She said, softly, and casting down her eyes :

"I have so envied her the privileged freedom that permitted *her* to do what I dared not."

Warren made no reply, but glanced uneasily round to see the effect of Leda's words upon his mother ; but the old lady had just a moment previously left the room, which Leda had seen and taken advantage of. She added :

"But you see, I have brought *myself* to you at the earliest possible moment. Mr. Croft escorted me to the gate, and is to call for me on his way back to Lucerne in an hour."

"You have some books with you?" he said, reaching his hand for one of the volumes that lay on her lap.

"Yes, and will put my eyes and voice at your disposal, if you wish. I am a tolerable elocutionist, you know ; and I fancied you might be too weak to read yet awhile."

"Thank you very much for thinking of it ; but I will not tax you."

"Do you, then, wish to deny me so small a pleasure? Heaven knows I have not so many."

She looked bitterly hurt as she said it, and Warren's

heart relented from its stern purpose of repressing her interest. It was only a simple thing enough that she proposed; and, with his mother present, and her husband's countenance of her act, there could not surely be any harm. Besides, the days were long and tedious, and he was weary of the dull confinement; and this lovely woman, with her rich, melodious voice, and wondrous soft charm, could shed a harmless luster through at least one hour of the aimless invalid days, till he could move about again.

Perhaps, too, suffering had weakened his faculties so much as to render him incapable of a sustained effort. He closed his eyes languidly, and said:

"As you please, madam. I am forbidden to talk much, but I believe there is no injunction against my listening."

"I do not mean to tax your mental digestion with any very strong food, you see," said Leda, opening the pages of a novelette, and beginning to read aloud.

The spicy odors and fragrance of lime blossoms from the sunny garden were blown through the open window into the pretty little room; and the drowsy hum of laboring bees mingled with the low and sweetly modulated tones of the beautiful reader. There was a soft, dream-like charm in it all to the enfeebled senses of the invalid. Even the living and splendid beauty of the woman before him, on whose ravishingly suffused face his eyes rested, seemed a part of some bright phantasmagoria, seen

through the mist and confusion of dreams, surrounded by the vague shadows of the fictitious characters that emerged from the romance she was reading, and moved about that central figure.

Soothed by these half-slumbrous fancies, the sick brain lapsed away into unconscious repose; and Leda knew, by the deep, regular breathings, that Warren slept profoundly.

She closed the book, and let her gaze dwell without fear upon the grand white face, that lay like an antique bas-relief before her. The ravages of pain and fever had not beautified the inharmonious physiognomy, but had accentuated the powerful lines of character which rendered Gordon Warren's countenance remarkable for force and dignity.

The resolute compression of the lips, which was habitual to him, and which gave a look of sternness to his lower face, save when he smiled or laughed, was not noticeable now in the relaxation of slumber. On the contrary, the softened curves of the fever-flushed mouth seemed almost sensuous by contrast with the severely cut and pallid features to which it belonged.

Looking on him thus, it was easy to divine the unerring insignia of character—which, in truth, the lineaments of the face are; and Leda made no great mistake in believing that the passional nature of this man was in no wise inferior in strength to his grandly developed intellectual organism.

Her vain heart waxed glad within her as she thought on the possibilities that lay before her in the frequent recurrence of mornings like the present. What should hinder the spell of her beauty with hours like this at her disposal? The musical droning of the golden bees among the lime boughs, the chirp of happy birds in the outer air, only enhanced the deep hush within the chamber; and Leda could hear the loud throbs of her eager heart as it pulsed in unison to her passionate hopes. She would go away now, that when he waked he should miss and want the soft glories of her loveliness.

With noiseless motion she rose, and, bending over the sleeper, touched his dark locks with her lips that were quivering like wind-blown roses. He stirred nervously, as if his frame had felt the light contact, but did not waken till long after. It was the aged, white-haired Dame Warren that he saw seated in the arm-chair before him, instead of Leda's royal presence. And, man-like, he sighed.

CHAPTER XV.

LOST !

The brightest and balmiest of spring-tides blesses the Land of Flowers, and a gay party of excursionists have chartered a small schooner for a May-day celebration on the lovely banks of the St. John's, about seven miles below the city. The ladies from Lucerne, under the escort of Mr. Croft and Julian Vernois, are among the patrons of the rural *fete*.

The spot selected for the occasion is the picturesque site of an old fort, celebrated in history as the place of refuge for the early settlers of Florida from the predatory attacks of the Indian tribes then inhabiting the fairest portions of the peninsula.

The ruins of its rocky foundations still surmount the eminence overlooking the river, and vines and creepers, rank as jungle plants, cover the crumbling mass of masonry.

For miles inland a dense forest of live oaks and magnolias shelters herds of deer and smaller game. But on this day the shy denizens of the green wood have retreated to their hiding-places before the invading throng of pleasure-seekers; and the patches of soft, rich turf, canopied over with festoons of vines, and inlaid with fallen petals

of the creamy magnolia flowers and purple wood-violets, are abandoned to groups or couples of romantic young folks, whose talk and laughter chime in sweetly with the brazen music that sounds from the band playing on the deck of the schooner moored to the cliff.

The soft, purple haze of a cloudless afternoon is gathering over the scene, and the smooth surface of the river glistens as an opaline lake under the tender blue of the sky.

“Will you have the kindness to step back to the landing and ask for my shawl that I left in the state-room, Miss Draper?” said Leda to the governess, who, with Faith, Vernois, and herself, was about to set out on a walk along the shore.

Miss Draper, of course, assented, and, watching her till she was out of sight, Leda said to Vernois, on whose arm Faith was leaning :

“Walk on slowly—Miss Draper and I will soon overtake you ; it is so tedious to stand and wait.”

Julian’s face lit with grateful pleasure as he returned the significant glance that Leda had thrown from the corner of her eye. He was narrating something to the girl at the time, and, without making any point of it, moved on with her along the bank in an opposite direction to the one they had set out to follow.

Leda seated herself on the grass to await Miss Draper’s return. Long ere the little governess reached the spot

Vernois and his companion were lost to sight among the thick foliage and the shrubbery of the wood.

"Why did they not wait for my return?" asked Miss Draper, with intense annoyance.

"Oh, we shall catch them in a moment; they can scarcely be out of hearing."

Leda led the way *up* the river-shore toward the cove they had proposed to visit, and which was one of the features of interest in this beautiful locality. Of course they reached the destined spot without ever catching sight or sound of the creole and his charge, who were by that time a mile distant *below* their starting point at the fort.

Alice Draper looked anxiously among the different groups collected along the sloping bank of the clear inlet for the graceful form of her pupil; but neither Faith nor the creole were to be seen.

"Where can they be?" she said, anxiously, touching Leda's arm as she spoke.

"Somewhere around, I dare say. They are neither of imbecile, and can certainly find their way without our assistance, I would think."

By no means satisfied with this view of the case, Miss Draper questioned some persons who were near her concerning the missing ones.

"They cannot have arrived yet. We have been here over an hour, and must have seen them had they come within that period of time," was the reply she obtained from the lady that she had accosted; and who added, see-

ing Miss Draper's look of distress: "But you need not worry about them. They will not go out of hearing of the music on the boat, and that will guide them back even if they lose the way a little. There are so many queer, intricate windings of paths through these woods to this place that they may have become confused, and taken one leading back to the fort."

Forcing herself to be satisfied with this suggestion for the present, Miss Draper waited till Leda proposed to return to the boat.

It was now after sunset, and the deeply shaded woods grew damp and chill with the rising mists from the river.

On arriving at the vessel, they found that a large proportion of the party had preceded them, and were already seated on the deck, from which the awning had been removed.

A May moon swung its silver disk just above the plummy pines of the forest, and shed its pale splendor over the glassy tides that lovingly lapped the shadowy banks.

Stars, calm and large, burned through the roseate ether, and lent their weird, sad charm to the utter stillness and wildness of the scenery.

One by one the straggling parties returned to the landing and boarded the vessel, till each passenger had answered his or her name as the boatswain called the roll before steaming up the river. Vernois and Miss Hilary alone were still absent from the company.

Mr. Croft approached his wife, and held a whispered conversation of a few moments with her.

Leda stated that Vernois and Faith had walked on toward the cove before her, and that not finding them there on her arrival with Miss Draper, she naturally concluded they had returned by a circuitous route to the landing.

Mr. Croft turned very pale as Leda concluded her account. He said, in a muttering tone :

“Good God ! suppose any harm befalls the girl ?”

“Well, it is not our fault,” said Leda, shrugging her handsome shoulders, and looking indifferent.

“Do you suppose *she* will exonerate us if evil befalls the girl ?”

Leda made no answer to this, but looked startled, and remained very thoughtful where she leaned over the railing in the bow of the boat.

Leaving her side, Mr. Croft called for volunteers among the gentlemen to go with him in search of the missing pair.

“Vernois is no woodsman, and Faith still less of one. No doubt they have got bewildered among the blind paths through the forest,” explained Mr. Croft to the company.

In a few moments a dozen men, provided with lanterns and torches, were on their way toward the wood, that was now wrapped in darkness, for only here and there the moonbeams could pierce through the dense roof of over-

lapping branches, laden with the tropical foliage and interwoven with vines and moss.

It was growing late into the night when the last of the scouts returned, dejected and weary, bringing no trace of lost ones.

"There was no use in waiting longer," the captain of the schooner said; and the passengers, tired with the day's fatigues, insisted on proceeding to the city.

Mr. Croft silently took his place by the side of his wife, who spoke not a syllable, but met the ominous fear that darkened her husband's eyes with a look of stony calm that half maddened him.

Alice Draper sat apart, straining her anxious gaze into the blackness of the gloomy woods along the shore, as if still seeking to catch the gleam of Faith Hilary's snow-white garments.

At the door of Lucerne Villa the returning trio were met by the ghost-like form of the housekeeper, Mrs. Foster.

CHAPTER XVI.

A DUMB SCOUT.

It was midnight when the excursionists reached the city, where they found many persons, friends and relatives, collected on the wharves, in anxious speculation as to the cause of their unwonted delay.

The news of the day's disaster was rapidly circulated through the community, and, at an early hour of the following morning, exploring parties had set out to continue the search after Julian Vernois and the unhappy young girl, whose beauty and innocence had already endeared her to many hearts.

There were doubtful looks and dark forebodings of evil exchanged between some of the elder and wiser folks, to whom the reckless character and unscrupulous career of Julian Vernois were no secrets.

But Faith's enchanting candor and purity seemed, in the minds of all alike, to defy the idea that she could knowingly or willingly have surrendered herself to the machinations of a man like Vernois. Therefore the universal fear pointed to a fatal catastrophe as the only probable conclusion.

About noon the rumors of what had happened, and

what was feared, reached Mrs. Warren's cottage on the outskirts of the city.

A servant who had been to market brought the story, duly embellished; and, in breathless excitement, the good dame carried it to her son, who was now so far convalescent as to sit or walk upon the sunny piazza, or among the flower-beds of the prim garden.

Dame Warren found him seated, with his book and cigar, under the drooping boughs of a large and venerable cedar tree at the end of the garden, where a low wicket fence divided it from the orchard, now a mass of honey-sweet apple blossoms, and all a-swarm with butterflies and bees.

Gordon was still very delicate; and the hollowness of his white cheeks, the dark circles round his eyes, told their own story of how nature and death had fought over the stalwart, but now wasted frame of the young man.

With many a needless word and irrelevant exclamation, the good woman repeated the tragic story of Faith Hilary's mysterious disappearance with the dark, handsome stranger who was the guest at Lucerne. Mrs. Warren was not ignorant of her son's deep interest in the fair young ward of his partner. Indeed, she had never heard him speak so much nor so tenderly of any one; and Faith's continuous attentions to him during his desperate illness had won for her the old mother's most grateful regard.

Gordon Warren heard her through with what patience

he could command, though a keener perception than Dame Warren's might easily have seen how his tried nerve was aching for the conclusion of the narrative.

"And they came back without finding the child!" cried Warren, huskily, as he rose to his feet, a baleful gleam flashing out from the empurpled sockets of his great, star-like eyes, and all his face quivering with an emotion his mother never dreamed of fathoming. The righteous rage of some dauntless but devout crusader blazed over his countenance; and, though he ground his teeth hard together, a sound strangely like a curse broke from his livid lips.

He strode past the wonder-struck old woman. The strength of his most robust health seemed suddenly to have leaped into his swelling veins, and fiery resolve to electrify his elastic form, as he stepped onward in the direction of the stables in the rear of the house.

The old lady knew him too well to attempt any interference with his humors; but her heart misgave her lest she had committed a serious indiscretion in her hasty disclosure of the event which so moved her son.

"He will do something now to bring on a relapse! The doctor said he must be so careful and quiet! Oh! why *didn't* I hold my tongue about the matter?"

A few moments after, she heard the clatter of hoofs, and saw her son mounted on his black Arabian gelding—the one extravagance of his life—and riding at full speed down the street.

Leda Croft was alone in the library at Lucerne, when she heard a step, that had often enough made her heart beat faster, cross the paved veranda and enter the vestibule of the hall. She rose quickly, and went forward to meet it.

"You!" she exclaimed, with glad surprise, holding out both of her hands to Warren, who now stood at the threshold of the library.

He took no notice of her welcoming gesture or smiles, but said, eagerly :

"Tell me all that you know about that miserable business of yesterday, and be as brief and circumstantial as you can."

Leda told her tale with cool, deliberate distinctness; but, when she had finished, Warren turned from her with an expression of the deepest disgust in his falcon eyes.

He knew that she had lied to him about the manner of her getting separated from Faith, and he knew, too, how worse than useless it would be to try to wring the truth out of a woman who was perpetrating a cold-blooded falsehood for her own purposes.

What those purposes were he did not guess nor question; but, for the first time in his life, he *hated* Leda.

All pity, all compassion, seemed to wither away under the steady white flame that lit Leda's eyes.

He loathed her that she could stand there with a lie on her lips, and the soft peach bloom on her calm cheek, while the fate of that delicate child, that snow-white dove

of maidenhood, hung in mortal peril, if not already consigned to ruin or death.

"Where is your husband and her guardian?" he demanded, sternly, while his glance flashed over her, scathing as a lightning blast.

"Gone out with the townsmen in search of *the lost*."

There was a scarcely perceptible intonation of scorn in her tone as she pronounced the two last words.

Warren's ear caught it, and it seemed to kindle his whole being with wrath.

He fixed her with a look, as he said, in a low, suppressed way:

"Madam, not all the angels in heaven, nor devils in hell, could make me believe that Faith Hilary could for one instant be untrue to the pure, chaste laws of her innocent being, or consent to one act that would leave suspicion on her conduct. But *I know as well as you*, that Julian Vernois is quite capable of the blackest villainy that man or fiend can practice."

With this he turned abruptly from Leda's presence, and passed out of the house.

The prolonged and mournful howl of a dog arrested his attention as he crossed the garden toward the side-gate, where he had left his horse.

He recognized the deep, sonorous baying of Faith's Irish setter, Mark, whose sagacity was almost human.

He stopped a moment; a happy idea occurred to him; he returned back and entered the house.

Leda was standing just where he had left her. She seemed stunned or spell-bound, so absent was her expression, as he said :

“Is not the dog, Mark, fastened up somewhere?”

“Yes; they locked him up yesterday to prevent his following Faith, and no one has thought to open his kennel this morning, I suppose.”

“Where is his kennel?”

“Out there toward the stables.”

Warren took his way to the spot where the faithful dog was imprisoned, and loudly grieving for the fair little hands that were accustomed to bring his breakfast and release him from his sleeping apartment.

Drawing the bolts, the young man called the dog to him, and bidding Mark follow, which he gladly did, being quite used to the presence and kindly attention of Faith's friend, Warren mounted his horse and rode away, with the beautiful setter at the heels of his fleet Arabian.

It was more expeditious for him to ride across the country to the scene of the previous day's *fete*, than to encounter the delay of getting a boat to take him by the water, and, drawing the rein upon his willing steed, he traversed the intervening miles within a wonderful brief space of time.

Arrived at the spot near the old fort which Leda had indicated as the one from which Faith had set forth with Vernois, Warren watched the motions of the dog with intense anxiety.

Mark had given a sharp, quick bark of satisfaction the moment he touched the green embankment where his mistress had stood just before departing on that fateful walk with the creole, and, after sniffing about nervously, set off at a blithe pace in an opposite direction to that which led to the cove.

A grim look came over Warren's face as he noticed this, to him, significant fact.

He tried to whistle and call the dog back, but it was useless. Mark's unerring sense had caught the trail of those dainty steps he had followed since his puppyhood, and that he loved as only dogs can love.

Guiding his horse with difficulty through the dense thicket, along a narrow pathway close to the edge of the channel, Warren kept the dog in sight, till at length Mark ran down a gentle declivity, hollowed out in the bank and sloping to the water.

Here he stopped and gave vent to his perplexity in low, troubled whines.

Dismounting, Warren followed the dog down the embankment, and, looking closely about him, noticed a stout ash stake driven deep into the mud at the verge of the water.

Thoroughly versed in the habits and pursuits of the country people, he at once concluded that the stake had been placed there for the purpose of securing the chain of one of the fishing boats, which might be seen fastened all along the shore.

But no signs of boat or boatman were to be seen, and only the piteous and incessant whines of the dog connected Faith Hilary's disappearance with this lonely, wild spot.

But these were "confirmation strong as proofs of Holy Writ" to the conviction in Warren's mind that the girl had been decoyed away from her friends by some selfish or vicious caprice of the unscrupulous creole—whether for mere idle pastime or with a darker purpose, Warren had not allowed himself to decide.

The thought that now suggested itself to him caused the flush that exercise had brought to his cheek to fade away, and leave his face tortured as with a deadly pain.

What if, in a mad freak, the creole had persuaded Faith to trust herself to his care in one of the frail skiffs used by the hardy black fishermen, and, as most likely, some fatal accident had befallen them in the eddying currents of the stream, where the tide-water met the more placid flow of the river?

Dreadful as this thought was, Warren seemed to breathe more freely after it than when his fancy had brooded on the more revolting possibilities born of his mistrust of the creole's honor, which he knew to be so darkly tainted with that kind of infamy of which society takes so little account where the offender is a *man*!

After much persuasion, Warren induced the dog to return with him to the steamboat landing behind them. Here he obtained a small scull and a negro oarsman, and,

following the left bank of the river seaward, he proceeded along the shore for a few miles beyond the place to which Mark had tracked the girl's footsteps.

Beds of marsh began to show in the widening stream as they neared the outlet, and, in passing one of these, Warren's eye fastened on a dark object lying among the rushes.

Causing the oarsman to pull the boat as near to it as possible, he discovered that it was a capsized boat, similar to the rude skiff that bore him.

"Do you know who owns the boat that is generally fastened to that little landing that we passed first on our way?" he asked of the negro.

"Ya-as, boss. One ole man w'at b'longs to Colonel Hunter hab fishin'-boat in dat place. 'Tain't dar now, fur I been look fur 'em w'en we pass de landin'."

"Would you know the boat by any peculiar mark or character in its shape?"

"Lord, ya-as, boss. Uncle Kelter (Cato) too partic'lar wid him boat not fur fix 'em so dar'll be no mistake ef any nigger try fur steal 'em. He hab one long slim fish w'at his little massa carb wid his pocket-knife on de inside ob de top plank."

"Here's a dollar for you if you swim in to where that boat is caught in the marsh and turn it over. I'm curious to see if it answers your description of Uncle Kelter's boat."

Dazzled by the prospect of the bright reward, Sambo's

rolling eyes turned reluctantly from the silver dollar that lay in Warren's palm, and, plunging into the stream, he soon grasped the keel of the little boat, which he overturned with ease.

To pull it along to the side of the scull was a simple enough task for the sinewy arm of the young plowman, and Warren's heart seemed to die within him as he caught sight of the carved fish on the inner side of the boat.

He no longer doubted the fate of poor little Faith Hilary at the mercy of the strong counter-tides circling around her, with only the unpracticed arm of a society exquisite like Julian Vernois between her and the cruel death.

Involuntarily his eyes turned from the wrecked boat to the deep, insatiate waves, as if seeking to pierce their cold mystery, and find the fair corpse beneath.

Had he guessed but half of the bitter truth, his soul would have rejoiced unspeakably to have seen the sweet young face deep buried in those dark waters rather than encounter the perils of her real fate.

CHAPTER XVII.

AN ECLAIRCISSEMENT.

Long after Gordon Warren's departure Leda remained in strange bewilderment of thought and feeling. Her emotions resembled those of some cunning artisan, who beholds a rare and curious fabric that he has constructed with infinite toil and pains suddenly crumble to the foundation stone in irremediable ruins.

Her thoughts traveled despairingly over the incidents of the past weeks, during which she had repeated almost daily her visits to Mrs. Warren's cottage. The glamour of the old days seemed to have gathered about the long, bright mornings that on one pretext and another she managed to spend in the little library, most frequently in company with both mother and son; but occasionally the good dame would become so engrossed in household avocations as to leave Gordon the unaided task of entertaining their beautiful guest. By turns they read to each other passages from favorite books, and not unfrequently bent together over the same page, forgetting quite the sad old tale of Rimini.

Only two days before that of the memorable picnic at the fort, Leda had fancied she felt a returning sense of the

old power when she held this strong, earnest soul fast bound in the chains of passion.

It happened in this wise :

Warren and herself were examining together some flowers under a microscope, in pursuance of a curious theory upon which they had chanced while reading a magazine article on a botonical subject.

Warren had adjusted the glass over the flower, and called Leda to observe the experiment. He sat at a table before the window, and she came and stood beside his chair, bending slightly over his shoulder, while she listened to and watched his demonstrations with the instrument.

Whether from the bending attitude of her head, or some other cause, cannot be ascertained, but the fact was that the comb fell from the heavy coil of her hair, and the whole bright mass of fragrant, rippling locks tumbled in a silken shower about the throat and shoulder of the busy scientist.

He stopped abruptly, and, as Leda gathered back the flowing lengths, she saw that Warren's hueless cheek had caught the warm, ruddy tints from the serpentine curls that had swept it. He seemed to forget what he had been saying, and, hurriedly rising, returned to his former place across the room, where he began a conversation in a new vein, but not without betraying a nervous consciousness which Leda construed into a subtle homage to herself. She did not, for she *could* not, guess how much the man

despised himself for such moments of weak emotional sentiment, with which his higher nature had no sympathy. To her own shallow soul there seemed nothing deeper nor wider than existed in the domain of sensuous and emotional life, and she could not for a moment comprehend how the mortal and the immortal part of a man might be at direct variance—how the flesh and the spirit might cast lots over the prize of a true man's honor.

That she still had power to make the delicate sensations of this noble being vibrate to her touch, gave her the most intense happiness, and filled her vain heart with hopes of a perfect triumph.

Remembering all this, and thinking on him as he had just left her, with a fierce, indignant scorn in his eye, and withering contempt upon his proud lip, she abandoned herself to the benumbing despair that has been described.

But under all this lay a consuming fear of the direct and personal disaster that was like to grow out of the present situation of affairs. As much as Croft she looked for and dreaded the result of Rachel's wrath on account of the misadventure of the previous day; and although to some extent she knew herself to be guilty of complicity in Faith's disappearance, inasmuch as she had connived at Vernois' taking the girl away from her protection, she had never counted on any immediate consequences attending this indiscretion on her part. It would have been the most consummate folly to have tempted her fate by a deliberate act like lending herself to Vernois' villainous de-

signs, further than to afford him, as she thought, an hour of uninterrupted conversation with her young charge.

Well as she concealed it, her horror was no less than that of Faith's guardian when the extent of the misfortune began to appear.

Not until they reached Lucerne, on the previous night, did Leda fully realize the imminent peril that manaced her.

Absorbed in gloomy contemplations of the dark possibilities impending, Mrs. Croft took little heed of the passing hours, until the sound of her husband's voice roused her from her reverie.

"Well, what news?" she asked, as Croft entered the library, looking haggard as some fiend-haunted criminal.

He closed the door securely before replying, and then, flinging himself wearily upon a couch near by Leda's chair, he said, in a smothered tone:

"Not a trace of them has been discovered, though every portion of the forest and the plantations for miles around have been faithfully and intelligently searched for a clew. It is the most baffling mystery that has ever crossed my experience."

"Which is saying a good deal," said Leda, with cutting sarcasm, "since mysteries seem to have been the order of your life."

Croft took no heed of her taunt, nor of the cold, malignant glance that accompanied it. He went on, speaking in a troubled way:

“The thing to be considered now is how to meet the sure and swift resentment of Faith’s mother. She cannot by any human possibility be kept long in ignorance of what has happened; for, you know as well as I, that both Mrs. Foster and Miss Draper are her minions and spies, and were forced upon us for no other purpose than to report, not only facts, but circumstances. Unhappily, Miss Draper’s testimony cannot fail to cast suspicion on you as implicated in this miserable business. And we both saw with what spirit the housekeeper received the news last night, modified, as it was, by my presenting the extreme probability that we should find the wanderers this morning, safely housed at one of the neighboring plantations.”

“Have you seen Mrs. Foster since your return?”

“Yes; and told her that several of our friends had not yet returned, but that I had only been strengthened in my conviction that they would find the girl in safety.”

“What does she say about it?”

“Nothing. I did not actually see her, for I spoke to her on the outside of a closed door. She gave me no reply to my remarks. I cannot exactly understand her strange manner last night. One can seldom catch a glimpse of her countenance, but it seemed to me that she showed an incomprehensible degree of terror during my narration of the affair.”

“Do you suppose they have dispatched any account of it to the mother yet?”

"I imagine not; they scarcely would until some definite information is received."

"Don't you think you had better set your inventive faculties at the task of devising measures to protect yourself against that woman's vengeance? She will be merciless enough if the girl has come to harm."

Ere Croft could answer, they heard heavy, rapid steps approaching the house, and, as Croft opened the door, Gordon Warren, attended by the dog Mark, entered the hall, and came directly into the library.

He seemed ready to drop with fatigue and faintness, as he sank down upon the nearest chair. The cold sweat stood thick upon his brow, round which the dark curls lay matted and damp. His voice sounded hollow and unnatural, as he said :

"I think there is no longer the shadow of a doubt about their fate. By the aid of the dog, I traced the poor child's steps to a small, lonely landing used by a fisherman to moor his canoe. Finding the boat gone, I took one from the steamboat landing, and followed down the stream, vaguely trusting to find some clew. Alas! it was only too readily discovered in the wrecked boat, quite too near the outlet for any but an expert swimmer of great physical strength to have saved a person from drowning. I had the boat identified as the one belonging to that particular landing."

He paused a moment; his voice had been growing fainter and his face more ghastly pale with each sen-

tence. He turned his tortured gaze full on Leda, and added :

“And, madam, that fatal embarkation took place just one mile *below* the fort, while you took Miss Draper to find her charge at the cove *above* it.”

This last announcement was made with difficult gasps for breath, and as if he was driven to utter it by some internal agony too sharp to be resisted.

At the last word, his head fell back against the chair, and it was plain that his consciousness was suspended.

The terrible strain upon his brain and body, in the enfeebled state of his health, had been too much for him ; and, now that a climax of certainty had been reached, his overtaxed nervous fiber gave way. He lay like one dead.

With an impulse of wild abandonment, Leda sprang to his side, uttering a passionate cry, and clasped the insensible head to her heart.

CHAPTER XVIII.

THE NOTE OF DOOM.

Either she had forgotten or recklessly ignored the presence of the man who occupied, to all appearances, the position of her husband.

Breathless with amazement and indignation, Croft be-

held the revelation of what bore the aspect of falseness in his wife, and treachery in his friend and associate.

Divided as his life had been from Leda's since that day when Rachel cast her ghost-like shadow between them, and keen and cruel as had been Leda's contempt for and avoidance of him, he had conceived so deep and fierce a passion for her beauty, that although he felt himself hopelessly cut off from the possession of it, he nevertheless suffered the furious, rending rage of a wild animal who finds some bold invader near his lair.

It flashed upon him now that he had been a blind fool not to have long ago divined the meaning of Leda's pointed interest in his young partner, whom he accused her of bringing to Lucerne in order to marry him to Faith Hillary.

His mind was too much influenced by jealous madness to reflect on Warren's consistent dignity toward the woman who now held his face to her heart, and rained her kisses on his unconscious brow. For one moment Croft was rendered powerless to move or speak by the violence of his emotions; but in the next, with his tusk-like teeth gnashing, and his thick lips foaming like a raging boar's, he leaped forward, and, seizing Leda with a grip of steel, wrenched her away from the breathless white form she clung to, while he spat from his working mouth a horrid oath.

"How dare you!" he muttered, as he flung her upon the couch, still grasping her shoulder, and glaring at her

with flame-like eyes that seemed starting from their hollow recesses under his bristling brows. "You I cannot kill, but his life shall pay the forfeit of your mutual crime!"

"'Mutual,' indeed! Ha! ha! ha! What a pitiful fool you are to imagine that if it were 'mutual' I should have been here now, enduring the sickening disgust of your presence—the loathsome torment of my position in this house—the gnawing anxiety and suspense which my so-called marriage to you entails. No, sir! You owe the pleasure of my society entirely to Gordon Warren's persistent rejection of the love I feel for, and have too plainly offered him. Let me hope that you are duly sensible of that obligation."

She looked the incarnation of a mocking devil as she uttered the scoff—her beautiful lips wreathed with a smile of infamous glee in the thrust she was giving, and her eyes emitting scintillations of wicked defiance.

"All the same, I shall *assume* that he is guilty, since through him alone I can punish you."

"Another poisoning tragedy, I presume! It is the only form of killing, unless a stab in the dark, of which your courage is capable! But unless something is done for him now, I think you will be saved the trouble of nerving yourself up to the very honorable vendetta that you contemplate."

Croft had previously relaxed his hold of her, and, as she made the last remark, Leda passed swiftly to the bell-

rope, and pulled it with energy, almost before he detected her intent.

A servant appeared on the instant.

“Send Miss Draper here, and a messenger for Doctor Wise.”

She gave the order with imperious and assured command.

In the tumult of his emotions, Croft seemed unequal to any interference with her directions. At no time was he a man of great aptitude under emergencies; he required reflection and time for deliberate action in all important affairs. At present he was distracted by conflicting demands upon his capacity for dealing with extraordinary difficulties. It was necessary that he should gather his faculties to a focus against the exigencies of his situation. He stood passive under Leda's dictation.

Miss Draper and a servant entered, and the fainting man was laid upon the couch, while the two women busied themselves with reviving him from the swoon.

When Doctor Wise arrived Warren was lying in a half-stupor, with increasing fever throbbing through his veins, and his wound bleeding from the abrasion caused by his violent exercise.

“He must be put to bed instantly, and kept utterly quiet,” said the surgeon, after a careful examination of the ugly, dangerous wound on his breast.

“Could he be taken home in a carriage, or on a litter?” asked Croft.

"Yes, of course; but not without serious aggravation to his present sufferings. I suppose there can be no objection to his remaining here for a few days, until he has somewhat recovered from to-day's work?"

"Certainly not," replied Leda, with a tone of determination that Croft thought best not to contradict just at present.

The patient seemed oblivious to everything that was done or said; indeed, he was already slightly delirious, as it was usual for him to be under the effects of fever, and he remained perfectly quiescent while he was removed to a bed-chamber and made comfortable.

Doctor Wise staid on for several hours to watch the symptoms of his patient, whose condition he regarded as most critical.

Nothing in medical science or surgical skill could have insured the recovery which had been so nearly established, had Warren been possessed of a less tenacious and resilient vitality, for the wound was of that desperate character under which a man of infirm constitution or flaccid temperament must certainly have perished. As it was, there had been times during his previous illness when the surgeon secretly despaired of his life. He had cautioned both Warren and his mother very earnestly against the danger of premature exertion or exposure while the ghastly wound was in process of healing; and, as he now watched the rapidly increasing fever, he felt that only a miraculous reserve of physical endurance could take that pain-wasted

frame through another siege of suffering and the exhausting waste from the reopened wound.

Of course Mrs. Warren was at once summoned to the bedside of her son, where Alice Draper divided with her the duties of nurse.

It was a sad pleasure for the kindly little governess to thus show her appreciation for the unvarying deference and gentle consideration which Warren had manifested toward her, in sharp contrast with the cold slights, and marked indifference that bordered on contempt, with which many others among the guests of Lucerne had treated her, in accordance with the prevailing idea of that period, that any employee, no matter in what capacity, was to be regarded as an inferior in social rank.

Absurd as the fact was, society elected to dictate the status of hirelings without the least regard to their personal qualities or mental attainments. The necessity which compelled them to be paid for their services, lost them the right to occupy the position among ladies and gentlemen to which their respective and superior attainments entitled them. This was thought requisite to the maintenance of social order.

On one occasion Vernois had intimated to Faith that she conferred unwonted honor upon her governess by treating her as a social equal. The girl had answered with indignant surprise :

“Do you mean to say that because I, an ignorant girl, employ a well-bred, intellectual, and dignified woman for

the purpose of having my manners improved, my mind educated, and my tastes artistically developed, I am to behave toward this superior intelligence with an insolent condescension that would insult her necessities and provoke her contempt of such narrow and stupid prejudice?"

"You have put your case with the extravagance of your youth and your sex," said Vernois. "It is by a strict observance of this difference in grade that our Southern society has become noted for its exclusiveness and purity in caste."

"There must be a serious defect in our system somewhere, [then," retorted the girl, cleverly, "since we are obliged to import our educational advantages, as in my own case with my 'Yankee governess,' as you are pleased to denominate Miss Draper; or else send our young people away to the North, or to Europe, to be taught the higher graces of life."

Vernois concluded it was wisest to leave Faith's devotion to her teacher alone, if he hoped to retain and augment her regard for himself. And soon after, Warren, who had overheard the whole conversation, said, with earnest admiration of Faith's pure principles :

"My little friend, let no man, nor woman neither, change or disturb your intuitive convictions of right and wrong. If it is necessary to offend the conventionalities in order to do justice to virtue, your own brave, true heart will always make the choice for you, and sustain you in it."

He had consistently practiced toward the governess this theory of independent action in matters of opinion, and more than once had interposed his chivalrous attentions to save Miss Draper from mortification by the indifference or neglect of less thoughtful men.

She was herself too noble a creature to misinterpret or abuse the delicacy of his conduct toward her; but it bound her grateful interest to him "with hooks of steel."

From this it may easily be imagined with what feelings she offered herself to share the cares of the sick-room with Warren's mother.

It was nightfall ere the doctor left the bedside of the now delirious sufferer and joined Mr. Croft, who sat alone in his study. Hearing him enter there, Leda crossed from the parlors to hear his account of the invalid.

The doctor was interrupted in the midst of his statement by hearing several persons enter the hall and approach the library.

Four men came across the threshold, and one of them stepped up to Mathew Croft, and showed him a writ of indictment for the crime of murder.

This was the sheriff of ——. His deputy officer then approached, and fastened the hideous handcuffs of the malefactor about the wrists of the prisoner.

The celebrated advocate of the law was then marched out from his own threshold toward the prison, whose occupants it had been his duty to prosecute or defend.

Not a sound of protest or remonstrance passed his lips

from first to last; and only the white horror that blanched and contorted his features evinced his conviction that a doom inevitable and dreadful had overtaken him.

As the guard conducted their prisoner down the hall, a wild, unearthly shriek resounded from above, followed by the fall of a human body.

Glancing up the stairway, whence the rending cry had sped, Mathew Croft beheld, prone on her face, the black-robed form of the half-blind housekeeper, Mrs. Foster.

CHAPTER XIX.

ON BOARD THE MADCAP.

Day is declining, and the sun sinks like a great world of dull red flame into the sea, off the coast of one of the Bahama Isles. The atmosphere is sultry and thick, and in the dead calm that broods over the sullen waves lurks the presence of a tropical storm. There is barely breeze enough to keep afloat the canvas of a small, doubtful-looking craft that heads toward the barren island, whose cliffs are just visible through the lurid, murky air to three men who stand upon the quarter-deck of the dingy vessel.

One of these men holds a sea-glass toward the coast, and says to the others:

“I don’t see what better we can do than put in to shore

as fast as possible until the storm is past. This wretched hulk would never weather the equinoctial tempest that is too plainly rising."

"She's an ill-looking bark, I grant you; but the devil himself couldn't sink her, unless he first made a hole in her bottom."

This answer came from a swart, evil-visaged seaman, who wore the dress of a Minorcan sailor, and the countenance of a Spanish cut-throat. The man to whom he spoke was, without doubt, a gentleman and an aristocrat. He replied to the sailor:

"The reefs along this treacherous coast are like enough to make the hole in her bottom, and, as for the devil's part in the Madcap's fortunes, I think he has turned that over to you and your confrere, captain."

"In that case, I must stand high in favor as a faithful steward to his infernal lordship, considering the little job the Madcap and we are doing for yourself at present, sir."

The gentleman made no rejoinder, but again lifted the glass and gazed upon the white, precipitous headland of the lonely island.

The Minorcan turned to his companion—a short, stout man, with gray hair, and a grizzly mustache to match it, but with a good-natured and almost kindly aspect, whose eye, nevertheless, glittered alertly under thick, stubby brows, and betokened a temper easily roused and less easily laid to rest—and said:

"What think you, mate?"

“If we three men were the sole live freight in the Madcap, I’d say, fast enough, keep to the high seas; but, taking into account the flimsy bit of womankind we’ve got stowed away below, I reckon it would be most gentleman-like to take shelter; for, I’ll warrant you, there’ll be a rough storm to-night.”

As the mate mentioned the female passenger of the Madcap the gentleman shuddered and grēw pale, but said nothing.

“About with her, then,” said the captain; and the next moment the keen, black bow of the Madcap was cleaving a foamy path through the bilious-looking water, making straight for the island coast, before a freshening breeze.

Leaving the two sailors to their unaided task of managing the vessel, of which they were both owners and crew, the gentleman descended to a dingy cabin, now lighted by a single lantern that swung from the ceiling—it was already quite dark below the decks.

Upon a soiled and worn couch, which formed a part of the meager furniture of the cabin, a woman was lying. Her wan cheek lay upon a delicate square of cambric that she had spread over the greasy, dark cushion, and her eyes were closed as if in slumber. A coarse woolen quilt from one of the state-rooms had been cast over her slender form, for the night was waxing chill.

In the noises which the vessel made, and the rattling of chains and cordage on the upper deck, she did not hear the approach of the gentleman, and was not aware of his

presence until he stood very near her, and, bending low over her head, laid his hand on her brow.

She gave a violent start—it was like a spasm—and a frightened cry broke from her lips, as she opened her eyes and drew herself away from the light touch of the man beside her.

“Did I wake you?” he asked, in a tone of mournful solicitude; then added, penitently, as he moved a step backward and folded his arms: “I am sorry if I disturbed you, but I felt so anxious lest you should be feverish and ill.”

The lady reclosed her eyes with a shudder, as she replied:

“I believe I was almost asleep. Oh, when will this miserable voyage end?”

Her voice had sunk to a piteous moan, as she asked the question.

“Very soon, I hope. You know I told you that the vessel had been driven from its course, and been becalmed for a day and a night. That is why we are out so long.”

“But we are moving now?”

“Oh, yes. A wind has sprung up, and we are now making for an island that is in sight, where we must stop until the storm now brewing is past. Our vessel is so small and poor I could not think of trusting your life to its frail protection in one of these gales from the equinox.”

"Shall we land? Are there people—*women* on the island?"

There was wild and almost desperate demand in the girl's tone, that told its own story of the horror she felt at being alone on the vast deep, with only three men—two of them desperadoes, as any one might see at a glance—the third no less fit to be the guardian and custodian of a maiden's fair fame.

"We *can* land, if you wish, and there may be inhabitants, but I do not know just yet where we are."

"Oh, God! why did you let me live to suffer a fate like this?" cried the girl, with despairing passion, as she raised her clasped hands to heaven, and then pressed them to her anguished face, as if to shut out the horrid present from her sight and consciousness.

"For pity sake, don't—don't!" pleaded the man, falling on his knees before her, and attempting to take her hands.

She sprang away from him as if his delicate, dark fingers had been adders that stung her to madness, and, in a sharp, suffering tone, cried:

"Do not touch me, unless you want to drive me frantic. Leave me—leave me at once!"

"What have I done to merit this from you? Do I not likewise suffer ten thousand deaths in the dire catastrophe that has brought you to this sore strait? Would I not give my life to release you from one pang that rends your sensitive soul?"

"If I seem cruel or unjust, you must forgive me. Only

try to place yourself in my stead, and you will know how little responsible I am for my wild words."

"Poor child—poor little Faith! Believe me, I do comprehend it all, and it is like a dagger rankling in my heart. I will go away now, but you must pardon me if I come sometimes to see that you want for no comfort that this wretched vessel can afford, otherwise I should never obtrude my presence on you."

It was Julian Vernois who said this, as with proud humility he bowed over his folded arms, and retired up the gangway, leaving Faith Hilary alone in the cabin of a Spanish smuggling vessel—alone with the cruel torments which naturally assailed a chaste, sensitive, delicate flower of maidenhood like Faith in a situation so engirt with every danger that can fright the soul of womanhood. Shipwreck and death seemed the least.

CHAPTER XX.

SERPENT AND DOVE.

After quitting Leda on the evening of the May *fete*, Julian Vernois had purposely led his unsuspecting companion in an opposite direction to the route proposed, which he knew to be frequented by parties going to and returning from "the cave,"

This was a beautiful sylvan spot, where the river curved inland for a considerable distance, making a smooth, lake-like pool of clear, shallow water, below whose surface the yellow sands gleamed like a bed of golden ore in the sunlight.

A dense fringe of birch and willow boughs overhung the margin, and through these the different paths emerged to the brink of the bright water.

Trusting herself to the guidance of her escort, and heedless of the fact that Leda and Miss Draper tarried so far behind, Faith walked on, engrossed with Vernois' sprightly talk, until they reached the place already described as a fisher's landing.

"We must have taken the wrong course," said Vernois, as he stopped to reconnoiter the surroundings, which were silent and lovely.

"Let us go back, then, and make a fresh start," said Faith, blithely, nowise concerned at a mistake so easily retrieved.

"Suppose we have a little row first? See, here is a nice little boat to our hand, and the river is calm as the Lucerne lake."

"That *will* be plersant, but is it not too late?"

"Certainly not; the party do not return for two hours yet, after moonrise. We need not go far."

Quite charmed with the idea, Faith made no further objections, and they were soon out upon the quiet tide.

"We will let the current take us down the river, and

row back to the steamboat landing in time to embark with the others," said Vernois, as he lay half reclined in the stern of the little boat, with one hand on the rudder, and the other holding the light shawl that she wore more closely about Faith's shoulders.

There was a keen smack of adventure in the incident that pleased the Bohemian taste of the creole.

It was out of the commonplace to be lying there in the roseate sunset glow, with his face upturned to the pure, lovely eyes of a beautiful young maiden, fair enough to have been the heroine of a Greek idyl.

His heart throbbed faster at the idea of having the girl all to himself, with nothing to hinder the free expression of that wizard tongue that had beguiled so many a gentle spirit from the "ways of peace and pleasantness" along the thorny paths of passion.

The indefinable charm and fascination of the man never appealed so strongly to Faith's innocent fancy as now, when she saw and felt it, encompassed and enhanced by the voluptuous beauty of the silent scene.

Watching the soft flush of the brilliant evening play over his dark, seductive face, and hearing his low tones, accompanied by the rippling of the tides, she seemed to feel the inspiration that might have thrilled through Ariadne's breast when borne along the rose-wreathed Naxian shores, with the young Olympian at her feet.

Far better than her own heart did Vernois interpret the changeful glow upon the girl's exquisite cheek, and the

sudden dropping of the pearly lids when his glance met hers with a ray too intense.

He had guilefully led their talk into that vein of sentiment where the very air about two sympathetic souls becomes tremulous, as if surcharged with quivering forces, and in which there ceases to be need of direct phrase to make the throbbing feelings understood.

Vernois had just finished repeating a few lines from a fervid pagan poem, on which Faith made no comment, and silence had succeeded—a dangerous silence that the creole knew well how to employ.

The maiden's downcast face was half averted from his ardent gaze, that nevertheless burned her cheek till a scarlet spot had come out upon its whiteness; her left hand lay on her lap, within easy reach of his lissome, womanish fingers. He laid them softly upon the cool, white wrist that her flowing sleeve of snowy muslin had left bare, and his dark, lustrous eyes were blazing like lamps.

Simultaneously with the touching of their hands, one low, impassioned word trembled like a note of minor music on his beautiful lips:—

“Darling!”

The sound broke the enchantment, for the girl drew herself from him with a violent motion that capsized the frail little wooden shell, and with a wild cry of fright she went down under the wave.

* * * * *

Oblivious to all but the delight of the romance he was

weaving, Vernois had not observed that the swift downward tide had carried the little boat very far below where it was safe for so small and light a vessel to go. Nor had he taken the least thought of the mingling currents with which he would have to contend in his attempt to row the boat up the stream.

Although a capital swimmer, he was physically too weak to battle long with the strong eddies that now circled round him and the limp white burden that he had caught and bore fast clasped in his left arm.

Fortunately, the shock of the cold wave and that of her terror had rendered Faith quite unconscious, so that he had no mad struggles to impede his efforts to save her.

Besides this, he was a man of wonderful nerve and presence of mind. The more extreme the occasion, the more cool and steady his brain. Danger sobered him in his wildest excesses.

Keeping Faith's head well out of the water, he looked about him.

It was ebb tide, and the currents were swift and strong toward the sea that lay scarcely a mile beyond.

To try to stem them by swimming up stream with his lifeless burden was not to be thought of—to make his way to the nearest bank seemed almost as impossible.

Straining his gaze seaward, he caught the gleam of a sail, touched by the bright rays of the setting sun. Some fishing craft returning to shore, he surmised; and, delib-

erately turning himself on his back, he pillowed Faith's head on his breast, and let the waves bear them outward.

The vessel whose sails had attracted Vernois' notice proved to be no fishing-smack, but one of those low-rigged cutters used in coasting trade.

To arrest the attention of the tall figure on the deck of the little vessel, within range of which he was with difficulty swimming now, was no great task, and, being already at anchor, she easily and quickly dispatched a boat to his assistance.

It was not long before the cold, insensible form of the poor girl was disposed upon a couch in the cabin, with a heavy blanket wrapped about her saturated garments, and restoratives applied (with no mean skill) under the prescription of the stout mate of the Madcap, whose appearance has already been described.

With a return to consciousness, Faith was made to swallow a little strong cordial, which completed the restoration of her benumbed faculties sufficiently to relieve all apprehension concerning the result of the accident. Instead of waking up to the full realization of what had happened, the girl lapsed into a profound sleep—induced, perhaps, by the potent draught which had been administered, and by the transition from intense cold to the comfortable warmth of the place.

As soon as this condition was reached, Vernois accepted the offer of dry clothing which was made him by the tall

Minorcan, with whom and the mate he afterward withdrew to the deck.

Here he discussed with the two men the chances of being carried ashore.

He discovered enough from their talk to inform him that the unhappy chance had cast him aboard a Spanish smuggling vessel; that the two foreigners were her owners, and composed her sole crew; that they could in no wise be induced to touch at the city of —, neither to undertake the task of putting him ashore with his charge, and that the utmost he could obtain from them was a concession to land him at the next port on the coast.

After this, the creole walked apart in troubled self-communings, and, revolving the situation under all its aspects through his dark brain, he suddenly arrived at the desperate determination to turn the accident to the fulfillment of his own designs in regard to Faith Hilary.

While he would have shrunk from the cold-blooded planning and execution of such a scheme as the tissue of circumstances by which he had arrived at the present trying situation, he did not hesitate long about closing with the fiendish temptation of using it to compass his end.

Yet it was a doubtful as well as most delicate enterprise. This one hope of reconciling the sensitive girl to the fate he proposed for her, lay in operating so powerfully on her sympathies, and appealing so strongly to her womanhood, as to establish her faith in his reverence for her character

and person, and his own deep sorrow for the disaster. But even a credulous, immature girl is often a problem to baffle the most skillful and experienced libertine; and, although he approached the encounter armed with the most honorable proposals, and supported by a seemingly veritable necessity for Faith to place herself under his most sacred protection by assuming his name, he found that in that slight, willowy creature, whose fibers and nerves seemed made of a gossamer texture, there was a protean resistance to his sophistry that would have done credit to a moral acrobat.

He opened the contest thus:

It was past midnight, and the cutter was flying before a stiff wind southward, when Faith awakened from her long sleep.

The heat from her limbs and the warmth of the cabin had thoroughly dried her light garments, and, oppressed by the weight of the heavy blanket, she had thrown it from her in her restless tossing, and lay in a careless and graceful attitude upon the low, broad sofa where they had first placed her.

The dim light of a single lamp revealed to her the strangeness of the place, and, passing her hands over her eyes as if to rouse herself more fully from what seemed to be a dream, she looked about her.

Slowly a sense of reality came to her, and then her thoughts recurred to her last conscious moment, ere her thoughtless movement had overturned the little skiff.

She started to a sitting posture, and peered nervously through the shadows of the dingy cabin.

Next she became aware of the rapid motion of the vessel, and heard the creaking of its timbers as they met the swell of the sea that was growing boisterous. Saving these sounds, all else was still as possible.

A low, smothered cry of fear escaped the girl. She had hardly uttered it when a voice behind said, gently :

“What is it, dear child?”

She turned with a movement of momentary relief and pleasure at hearing a tone that she knew, and met the dark, quiet face of the creole. He was sitting just in rear of the sofa, with his elbow resting on its high, carved back, and his head leaned on his hand. He had evidently been keeping watch over Faith’s slumbers. There was a sad pathos of mingled tenderness and compassion in his large, beautiful eyes, that sometimes wore the touching expression of a fawn’s.

“Oh! where are we, Mr. Vernois? Why did you not speak sooner? I was so scared, and felt so lost to waken in this awful, still place!”

She spoke with hurried, panting breath, looking eagerly into Vernois’ face,

“I did not want to startle you till you had quite waked up. You need have no fear, we are safe. I have not left you for a moment.”

“But where are we? This is a ship we are on, is it not? I hear waves, and feel the plunging motion of a

moving vessel. It is like when I crossed the gulf coming from Texas."

He thought it best to soothe her by affecting to think lightly of their mischance.

"Yes," he said, smiling, "we are aboard a little coasting vessel that picked us up out of the water in a half-drowned condition, where the tide had borne us out to the mouth of the river. Luckily I clung to you so fast that the waves could not take you from me, even after I lost the power of volition."

Faith had turned white, and shivered at the first part of his recital; but at the last sentence, into which he threw a tender meaning that he meant to reach her heart, her cheek flushed hotly, and her lids dropped.

She remembered now, with a strange, wild fluttering of the heart, the incident which had immediately preceded the accident of which she was the direct cause. She said, softly and timidly:

"What vessel is it, and where are we going?"

"We are on a Spanish coaster, bound for the West Indies on its return from a cruise along the shore as far up as the Carolinas. But I have induced the captain to put us ashore at the nearest port. I hope to land you safe and sound at Lucerne before many days."

"How many?"

"Ah! well, I cannot say precisely. You know we cannot calculate too certainly upon a sailer. You see, it

is not as if we had a propeller astern of us. We must wait on wind and tide."

Faith made no answer, but looked very grave. She was not made of the stuff that collapses under pressure, or that wastes its vitality in useless bewailings. A light sigh escaped her unawares. She was too generous to make the catastrophe worse by complaints.

"Can you not go back to sleep now? I will watch over you till morning."

His manner was considerate and delicate as a brother's, and Faith smiled gratefully as she answered :

"Oh, no. I am not in the least sleepy nor tired now; but you must be, if you have been sitting there long. Suppose you lie down and let me keep awake?"

"No, I could not think of that; we will both keep awake, unless you will retire to the state-room that has been put at your disposal. In that case I will consent to have a nap."

"That will be far the most sensible arrangement. Which is my state-room?"

"Here." Vernois opened the door to one of two narrow apartments.

"Are there many passengers?" she asked, a little nervously, glancing round again upon the small saloon.

"Not many," replied Vernois, instantly afterward closing the door on her to avoid any more awkward questions, until daylight and the refreshment of sleep should have lent their sustaining influence to the ordeal of revelation.

CHAPTER XXI.

THE MADCAP TAKES A PRIZE.

Faith awoke early the next morning from the uneasy sleep that came over her after retiring to her state-room, with a sound like the roar of artillery booming around her, and the little vessel wildly plunging about amid furious waves.

She listened for some sound of life in the cabin, from which she was separated only by a thin partition; but an hour went by without a sign to assure her that any human creature was near.

At the end of that time she was relieved from her feeling of utter isolation by hearing a rap on her door.

She opened it at once, and found that her visitor was her companion in misery, Julian Vernois.

The lamp still burned in the cabin, and in its wan, sickly rays the olive-hued face of the creole wore a haggard pallor, which was enhanced by the almost preternatural luster of his splendid eyes.

He held a cup of black coffee in one hand and a small plate of sea-biscuit in the other, and smiled, as he said :

“I am playing stewardess to you, you see. You must take something to refresh you. Have you been sleeping?”

“Yes; but I have been awake and up for an hour.”

Faith took the cup and plate, as she answered.

"Why did you not let me know it? You must have been both lonely and frightened."

At his request she entered the cabin, where he placed the things for her on the narrow table that stood in the center of the apartment, and set a chair for her beside it.

Faith sipped the coffee in silence. When she had emptied the cup, without touching the bread, she said:

"Where are the other passengers?"

Vernois hesitated a moment, then replied, a little nervously:

"On deck."

"On deck! In this weather?"

"That is to say, the captain and mate are on deck. *We* are the only passengers."

The girl fixed her eyes on him in a startled way.

"Is it true," she asked, her face paling at the thought, "that only the captain, the mate, and ourselves are on this ship?"

"There is a third—the cook."

"Where is *she*?"

"The cook," answered Vernois, reluctantly, "is getting breakfast just beyond there," pointing to a door that separated the cabin from the kitchen.

"Can I go there?"

"Yes, if you like. Take my arm; the vessel rocks so that you may fall in walking."

She placed her hand on his arm, and was conducted to the kitchen.

Vernois opened the door, and Faith beheld a tall man, with the countenance and the dress of a Malay. He was busy about a small cooking-stove.

Without a word, Faith turned away, and was led back to her seat by the table.

She bent her cheek on her hand in a thoughtful attitude.

Vernois took down some books from a row of small shelves fastened against the wall, and, placing them near her, said :

“Perhaps you may find something here to amuse you. While you look over them, I will go up and view the weather.”

Soon after this the Malay came in to lay the things for breakfast, and Faith took her seat upon the couch at a little distance, while he prepared the table.

When all was ready, the cook ascended to the upper decks, and, immediately after, Vernois, accompanied by the captain and mate, appeared.

The two sailors made a respectful salute to Faith—addressing her as “madam”—which made her start, turned to the roots of her hair, and look from them to Vernois in a piteous way that caused him to feel like the villain that he was.

She declined to partake of the morning meal, declaring that she needed nothing more than the coffee she had

already taken. With the intuitive "sixth sense" of a woman, she occupied herself in studying the countenances of the two men at the table.

The dark, sinister face of the Minorcan, with his few and cautiously uttered sentences, and his roving, furtive eye, that was at once everywhere and nowhere, so chilled her blood that it seemed to trickle through her veins in an icy stream.

Turning from this forbidding physiognomy to that of the mate, she met a pair of pale-blue eyes, with a silvery light in them, fixed on her face intently. Curiosity and compassion were equally blended in the hardy lines of the bronzed visage that fronted her, and this good-natured pity appalled her almost as much as the somber, insincere look of the other. The mate's pale eye seemed to hold her gaze in spite of her effort to turn it away. A general conversation, constrained on the part of all the participants, took place, and it was a great relief to Faith when it was over.

After tea, when the storm had subsided, Faith was induced to go up on deck with Vernois, for the wind was now southerly and warm. The kindly mate had put at Faith's service a sea-chest, filled with shawls, and mantles, and stuffs, both white and colored, that he was taking, he said, as a present to his daughter, in South America. Of these she had selected a soft, bright shawl, and one of those gay, striped petticoats so much in vogue at that day. Looping her white flannel dress, which the sea-water had

not much damaged, over this gaudy petticoat, and twisting the shawl gracefully about her shoulders, she managed to effect a toilet at once unique and captivating. The dread of her strange position was beginning to wear off under the reverential kindness of Vernois, and the respectful deference of the two seamen.

"It is a night of tropical splendor!" said Vernois, who leaned with Faith upon the deck-rail in the bow of the boat.

"We are mighty close to the tropics, sir," said the mate, who was passing.

"What is this latitude?" asked Faith, with anxiety.

"Couldn't *exactly* say, madam;" and the man disappeared aft.

"Why does he call me 'madam'?" asked Faith.

"He thinks—he thinks you are my wife——"

"*Your wife!*"

The words came with a gasp—she was deadly pale.

"Yes; you must not be angry—it was the only way to make your position appear safe. I thought of telling them you were my sister, but when I saw the young captain I feared he might become gallant, if we had to remain any length of time on his ship, and so I took the course I deemed wisest to protect you from all unpleasantness.

"Oh, Mr. Vernois!"

It was like the sick cry of a wounded child; and, as she uttered it, she let her pale face fall upon her arm that rested on the railing.

It would have touched the heart of a devil to look upon her, having heard all the deep humiliation that rose from her heart in that helpless cry. Vernois was only a human devil, and his manhood did ache in sympathy with the meek pain of the innocent creature who owed this bitter hour to his cruel selfishness. But his sympathy with her suffering seemed only as fresh fuel to his passion for the beautiful, flower-like woman who was so utterly at his mercy. There leaped to his heart an irresistible desire to raise the sweet, bowed head and clasp it to his breast. He had called her his wife, and he wildly longed to make her his own forever—not more with the craving of passion than with all that was left in him of a nobler sentiment.

He bent above her now, touching her bright hair with a soft pressure of his warm palm, and murmured low :

“And why not let it be so, dearest? Why not be *my* Faith—my hope, my love, and my life?”

She quickly lifted her head, shaking from it his caressing hand, and, rising to her feet, while her face and form assumed the indescribable dignity that is the crowning grace of a true woman, she said, in a clear, firm voice :

“Mr. Vernois, is this a time or place for you to speak such words to a lone girl, unprotected save by your own chivalry, unguided save by her instincts, and oppressed as I am by a thousand pangs that you cannot, or, at least, *do* not understand?”

“But, Faith, darling, I love you so, and so yearn to be your comfort and support in all this bitter trial! Forgive

and have pity on me, for I cannot live near your presence and *not* utter the deep ecstatic love that fills my whole being if I but see you, or hear your voice !”

Her tone was almost stern, as she replied :

“ If it were true that you love me, you would have died rather than hurt me by those words. Let me make myself understood, now and for all time. Whatever might have been, had you asked my hand under the sanction of honor, and the protection of my social surroundings, rest assured you have forever forfeited your right to my confidence by the unfair advantage you have taken of our mutually unhappy situation. It was *not* necessary that you should so misrepresent my position in speaking of me to those strange men, and it never shall be necessary that I shall occupy it.”

With these hot words vibrating lowly on the moon-lit air, and her fair face glowing with indignant pride and resolute heroism, Faith Hilary turned away from her companion and passed swiftly to her state-room.

After that night she refused to be alone for one moment with Vernois, and, whenever forced to be left with him, she either retreated to the close discomfort of her state-room, or manifested such aversion as obliged him to leave her presence.

But Vernois felt that he held in his hand the winning card, and, if all things else failed him, he would surely play it.

A dead calm succeeded the hurricane that had swept the

Madcap far to the south-east, and with the first breeze that filled her sails, after lying nearly two days on a sea like glass, she came in sight of the island referred to in a former chapter.

* * * * *

Night, bodeful and gloomy as a vision of Hades, had fallen ere the Madcap touched at the island, to whose coast she had been guided by a bonfire that blazed upon the tallest cliff of the headland.

She had shown a signal of distress while still a good way from shore, and a boat, manned by four stout rowers, had come to meet her just off the sand-bar, over which it was impossible for even so small a sailing-vessel as the Spanish cruiser to pass at low tide unpiloted by a skillful guide.

The captain held a colloquy with the wreckers before deciding on approaching nearer to the island. He ascertained that it was a mere fishing village, whose inhabitants were mostly comprised of those who followed the precarious trade of wreckers.

The Minorcan, who called himself Senor Valasco, proposed to send his passengers ashore, if they wished to land, but expressed his preference to keep on his route southward the moment it should be safe to leave the small harbor that lay just ahead. In that case, he thought they had best remain aboard the cutter.

While the little vessel was cautiously making its way through the narrow channel under the direction of the pilot from the shore, Vernois went down into the cabin to

consult with Faith upon the question of landing or remaining aboard the Madcap.

He had not attempted to converse with her since the evening that she had so emphatically repulsed him, except in the interview earlier on this same evening, the discouraging result of which has been already narrated.

It was with some uneasiness that Vernois again sought Faith's presence. He found her seated at the table in the cabin, reading.

Anxiety and sleeplessness had made a marked change in the fresh beauty of the girl; but there was a touching pathos in her pure pallor, and the weary droop of her lids, that made her loveliness all the more appealing to the sensibilities of the sterner nature of a man.

"I am sorry to annoy you," began Vernois, in a gentle, deprecatory tone, as he stopped on the opposite side of the table in front of her; "but the captain wishes to know your pleasure about going ashore."

"What do you advise?" she asked, in a troubled way.

"I should say by all means remain on board for to-night. It is true that a terrible storm is rising, but we shall be anchored in safe waters, and it is impossible to judge of the advantages of the island, which is only a fishing village, until daylight, when we can reconnoiter. I will go ashore at the earliest possible moment, and bring you a report."

"Yes, I think that will be best."

She returned to her book, while her breast heaved with

a long, deep sigh. The cruel strain on her patience had worn her sadly.

All the prognostics concerning the weather were fulfilled. During the whole night long, in the roar and surge of the breakers out at sea, one seemed to hear the frantic howls of a pack of fiends, unchained from their dismal caves in the under-world.

But the storm was brief as it was violent, and the next morning emerged from the gates of the east in rosy splendors, treading its bright way over a calm sea.

"Shall you go ashore with the wreckers when they return this morning, sir?" asked the Spaniard of Vernois, at breakfast.

"Yes; I will look about, and perhaps madam would prefer stopping here on the chance of catching a northward-bound vessel, rather than be taken farther south."

"I would certainly prefer it, if these people here are not savages," said Faith, sending a glance full of indignation upon Vernois, who had called her "madam" for the first time in her hearing.

The Minorcan cast down his swart face, over which a smile like that of a young tiger had flitted. Evidently he had watched the drama between this reputed husband and wife with a degree of interest that they little suspected.

The mate was not present during the discussion; perhaps if he had been, many dark passages yet to be recorded in our tale had not transpired.

Within an hour Vernois went ashore with two of the

islanders. After investigating the vicinity for several hours, and forming his determination to advise Faith against landing, he returned to the boat, and was soon rounding the little headland beyond which the Madcap was anchored. But lo! the sunny little haven slept like a lake with never a speck on its bosom. Afar to the west gleamed the sails of the vanished ship. The Madcap had borne away his prize.

CHAPTER XXII.

MAN TO MAN.

Senor Diez Valasco, captain of the Madcap, was the scape-grace son of a wine merchant living at Mahon, on the Island of Minorca. The father bore a character of the highest respectability, but having committed the mistake of marrying the wrong woman—a pretty ballet girl—his children had disappointed his expectations.

At an early age the boy, Diez, rebelled against the discipline of the school at which he was placed, and went to sea without the knowledge of his parents.

He made a voyage aboard a trading vessel as cabin-boy, and was absent in the East Indies for three years, where he learned the craft, the views, and the tastes of the Orientals, without acquiring any of their virtues. He returned

at the end of this period to the paternal roof, and was coolly informed by the implacable old merchant that he might keep his career in his own hands, as he (the father) had no idea of allowing his hard-earned wealth to be squandered by a renegade.

Perhaps the old man saw too plainly that his love, pains, and expense would be more than wasted on the the wild, reckless youth, whose daring was only equaled by his utter contempt of honor and religion.

From bad to worse young Diez kept on his lawless course through many a desperate and disgraceful episode, till he finally attained the dignity of captain of a privateer and smuggling vessel, of which a small share was owned by Graff Conway.

The mate had begun life as an English sailor, but having joined in a conspiracy to scuttle the ship, was discovered, and with his fellow criminals convicted and sent to Botany Bay. He had made his escape, changed his name, and, by a succession of strange adventures, became at last associated with the young Spaniard, Valasco, in the dangerous enterprise of engaging in the smuggling trade.

But apart from his professional vices, Graff Conway was a man in whose heart the humanities could never be utterly stifled.

He was brave as a lion, and tender-hearted as a woman, when his better nature was appealed to—in short, one of those anomalous creatures for the possession of whose

soul the good and the bad angel wage unceasing conflict. When his worst passions were fairly roused, he became a fiend—when his heart ruled him he was the veriest lamb. In “business affairs,” as he termed all matters connected with his trade, he was absolutely devoid of conscience; but this did not prevent his having a very high sense of honor with regard to other matters, especially where the weak sex was concerned.

The man was a husband and father, and faithful in both relations as far as his personal conduct; and, as much as was practicable, he kept his family in ignorance of the wicked side of his character.

As for the third person aboard the little vessel, the Malayan cook, he was simply a tool of Valasco’s—man-of-all-work on the ship, and, in time of danger, sailor or soldier, as was required—speaking no language but his native tongue, having no affections and no ties—a machine, in fact.

Valasco believed him to be devoid of passions. In this he was mistaken. The silent, unsympathetic Malay was literally *devoured* by two passions—avarice and revenge.

Of the first Valasco was the minister, being generous in his donations to the Malay. Of the last, Valasco was the destined victim, having come between the Malay and his love.

Between the captain and the mate of the Madcap existed no bond, save their associated interests in the vessel,

and their "*mutual participation in the perils and prizes of the cutter.*" This last clause formed one of the articles of agreement sworn to and signed by each of them when their co-partnership was created.

Perhaps Senor Valasco had forgotten this passage when he weighed anchor and sailed away from the creole, bearing off Faith Hilary.

It happened in this wise :

When the weather was fair, or the Madcap at anchor, the captain and the mate took it by turns to seek repose in their respective state-rooms, one of which was now devoted to the use of their fair passenger.

On the morning after their arrival in the island harbor, it was the mate's turn to sleep, and it was during his profound slumbers that Vernois set out for the island.

No sooner had the boat bearing the creole disappeared around the headland beyond which lay the village, than Captain Valasco summoned the Malay, and, with his assistance, weighed anchor and hoisted sail before a favoring wind.

Faith, who had not left her state-room since breakfast, but lay in her berth reading a book, concluded that Vernois had returned from his inspection of the island, and had decided it was safest for them to proceed with the cruisers on their way. Therefore the motion of the ship gave her no other concern than a feeling of disquietude at finding herself condemned to a protracted season of this dismal imprisonment. Not the most remote suspicion of

Vernois' real designs had, or could have, penetrated her pure mind; nor did she doubt for an instant the intention of the captain to land them at the first possible point. Her sole anxiety, after the painfully embarrassing circumstances that encompassed her, was for the friends who would be filled with alarms for her safety, and consumed with doubts as to the cause and manner of her disappearance. The hope of being restored to Lucerne before her mother could be apprised of her mischance, alone saved Faith's gentle, affectionate heart from the keenest anguish. It was not without a sense of relief that she felt herself once more moving onward, and the thought of reaching Lucerne reconciled her to remaining aboard the Madcap.

Resuming her book, she endeavored to banish her gloomy reflections, and the movement of the ship over a calm sea so soothed her, that she soon fell into a deep, sweet sleep, from which she did not waken until the day was far spent. Nature was repaying herself for the restless tossings of the previous night.

Meantime the mate had arisen from his couch, drenched his gray head and grizzly beard in a pail of cold water, arranged with decency the collar of his blue flannel blouse, combed his locks, and repaired to the quarter-deck, along which he found the young captain pacing slowly.

Graff Conway had a keen eye in his head, as we have stated elsewhere, and it was well skilled in tracing the

meanings of the shifting lights and shades upon the faces of those with whom he came in contact.

As the mate advanced, Valasco threw up his saturnine face, and there shot a gleam strangely like defiance from the lurid darkness of his eyes.

"I wonder what devilment he's been up to *now*?" thought Conway, stopping short, with his bushy head thrown a little to one side, like an eagle's when it poises itself to reconnoiter. Then he said aloud:

"Where's the gentleman, cap'n?"

"He concluded to stay ashore," replied the Minorcan, sulkily, and turning in his walk so that his back was toward the keen, shrewd countenance of the mate.

"Eh? And how did the pretty little madam like being taken on the island?"

"She didn't go. The creole gave me his check on the Bank of —— for a thousand dollars, if I'd land him and take the girl on to the nearest port. Of course you'll get half of the money."

"What does she say to being deserted by her husband?"

"She doesn't know a word of it yet."

"What?" roared the mate, in a sudden burst of fury, that lit up his pale eyes with a sulphurous glare.

"I say she doesn't know it yet; and, what is more, I don't imagine she'll care. He's no more her husband than you are. I heard this much from her own lips."

He then related the scene and conversation that had transpired on deck the night when Faith upbraided Ver-

nois for his falseness and baseness in placing her in such a position.

“How did you hear all this?”

“I was lying in the moonlight, behind some coils of rope, near where they sat down, and, not wishing to embarrass them or discommode myself, I remained quiet, and got the benefit of their talk. She hates him—you must have seen that.”

“Yes; but I saw something else as well—he loves her, and forty cable chains could not have drawn him from this ship if he had known it was to part him from her. I say, cap’n, you’re a deep one—but I know you!”

“What do you mean?”

“Well, *this*—if you’ll pardon plain talk. You may have done the girl a service by leaving the creole behind—and I think you have; but if you think me so great an ass as not to know *why* you left him *without his leave*, you’ve known Graff Conway to precious little purpose.”

“See here, mate,” said Valasco, squaring his tall, brawny frame right in front of Conway, “*I’m* captain of the Madcap, and her passengers are *my* affair—do you understand?”

There was no mistaking the meaning of the devilish scowl on the captain’s black brows, and Conway knew right well that an adamantine purpose lay underneath those sinister remarks. But the grizzly old tar was not the man to hold his peace for either bark or bite of the fierce wolf he knew Valasco to be when his darker passions were

fairly roused. He did not wink an eye, nor stir a fiber, as he answered, with his steely glance quivering over the Minorcan's face :

"Yes, I understand that, and more, perhaps, than you care I should. But, Diez Valasco, I want *you* to understand that the pale little girl who is now aboard the Madcap is not the 'affair' of captain and mate, but man and man."

"Aha! So *you've* had an eye to the beauty of our pretty little cargo, have you? Ho! ho! ho! I reckon we'll let her choose between us, mate; I fancy I'll have the odds on your sixty winters."

The scorn of the captain's bitter laughter rang out over the deck, and Conway waited quietly till it was hushed. His tone was low, but clear as a bell, when he said :

"Captain, you've dared many a dark deed in your life, short as it is; but, by all the powers in heaven, I swear you shall not utter a word that a saint might not hear in the pure ears of that child, while a pulse beats in Graff Conway's breast!"

With this the old sailor turned sharply away and descended to the cabin.

CHAPTER XXIII.

GRAFF CONWAY.

It was the state-room of the mate which had been offered by him for the lady's use the first night which Faith spent aboard the cutter. With the deftness of a sailor the old man had tidied up the little apartment, taking from it his own "traps," and adding to its scant furniture whatever the ship afforded that was likely to contribute to the comfort of the fair occupant for whom it was destined during at least three or four days, as they then thought. Clean, fresh linen was about the only luxury connected with it, but there was nothing wanting to make it a passably comfortable dormitory.

Over the berth and the narrow settle against the wall the old seaman had spread some of the pretty, bright chintz from the store of material he was carrying to his daughter, and upon the little shelves suspended around he had placed a few books, and shells, and bits of coral. To the door of this little closet he now approached. Unconsciously to himself his footfall grew lighter, and his hard, weather-beaten face more reverent, as he neared the threshold, made sacred by the virginal presence that tenanted its interior, and over whose safety he was now the self-constituted guardian. He rapped gently on the door.

The sweet, fresh voice of the girl called out:

“What is it, Mr. Vernois?”

“It is not Mr. Vernois, if you please, but Conway, the mate.”

The door was instantly unclosed, and Faith's lovely face, flushed from slumber, appeared at the entrance. The dewy luster of an infant's eyes shone in hers as she lifted them to the kind face of the mate, whose gentle acts of thoughtfulness had gratefully impressed the lonely girl.

“I came to see if you needed anything,” he said, kindly.

“No; I was just awake after a long nap—I slept so little last night.”

“That's right—nothing better for young people than sleep and sunshine. Won't you put on your shawl and come on deck for awhile?”

Faith thought of meeting Vernois, and said:

“No; I believe I'd rather not.”

Just at that moment the captain passed the door, and entered his state-room. The mate was due at his post. He said, in a significant way, to Faith:

“You will oblige me by coming up for a minute—there is no one there.”

She instantly wrapped her shawl round her and went with him. The intuitions of children and innocent women are so clear and true!

“Sit here.” He had placed a cloak over a pile of

canvas for her, and she took the seat. The sun was almost gone, but there was still a rich, golden brightness in the air, and a warmth. The sea was like jasper.

"Would you mind it very much if you heard that your companion had staid behind on the island?"

The rough seaman was too much used to plain speech to be very adroit in his manner of making the girl aware of her present situation. She looked up in a blank, incredulous way, and said:

"Sir?"

"Would you be very sorry if you knew that I should have charge of you solely until we can land you safely with those who can take you to your own people?"

"Do you mean, sir, that Mr. Vernois has indeed left the vessel—and—and me?"

"Yes, my child; I mean just that, or else the vessel left him; I can't exactly tell which, as I was fast asleep when we sailed from the island. The cap'n says Vernois preferred to remain on shore."

"Which you doubt—is it not so?"

"Yes; I doubt if he had any say about it. Our cap'n is sometimes a mighty impatient fellow, and, maybe, Vernois staid ashore too long to suit him. But *you* sha'n't be the worse for his absence, my dear. I've got a sweet, good girl of my own—near about your age, too. I'll just imagine I'm taking care of my own little Floy, instead of a strange young lady; and you'll do me a favor to put yourself as much in Floy's place as you can."

There was something in the old man's manner that went directly to Faith's heart, and unlocked all its simple trust to him. She smiled a little as she answered :

"You are very good to say so. Perhaps, as I'm already in some of Floy's clothes, it will not be very hard for me to fancy myself Floy's self. But what will become of Mr. Vernois?"

There was no pain or anxiety in the inquiry, only a humane interest in the fortunes of her fellow-sufferer. Conway divined this. He said, with a re-assuring air :

"Oh, he's a man, and can manage his escape somehow. At any rate, he is on *terra firma*, with his own species, and won't starve. For the rest, I suppose a passing vessel may pick him up. It is only of you that I shall think now."

Faith tried to conceal the feeling of relief that had come over her at the thought that she was freed from at least one of her causes of distress. She had no idea that Vernois' absence could render her situation more complicated or embarrassing.

"How much longer shall I have to be at sea?" she asked, showing that she had for the moment dismissed Vernois' fate from her thoughts. The mate drew his own conclusions from this significant fact. He said :

"I hope only a few days, at most ; but in case it might be longer—we can never calculate on wind and weather—you'd as well busy yourself with fitting out your wardrobe from Floy's chest of stuffs. Of course, you can sew?"

"Oh, yes, indeed; and nicely, too."

"I thought so. I can generally spot 'a neat, home-bred Phylis' from one of your know-nothing, do-nothing fine ladies."

"How can you tell?"

"Well, *that's* more than I know; instinct, I suppose. The scientists set all that can't be explained down to instinct, don't they?"

"I am afraid I do not know much about science."

"So much the better; it's a poor thing for women to waste time on."

"Or perhaps women are poor things to waste science on," returned Faith, with the first outright peal of laughter that had escaped her lips since her being taken aboard the vessel. The atmosphere about her seemed to have lightened, or some heavy oppression taken from her spirit.

Poor child! She did not dream that other causes for depression, even more serious than Vernois' love, might lurk near her.

"You can't expect me to assent to so ungallant a proposition. When I think of my dear old wife, and Floy, and the other girls, I can't feel that 'women are poor things,' on *any* account."

"Tell me about Floy."

"Wait a bit, then, till I look round the ship."

After the inspection the mate came back, and, seating himself on a camp-stool in front of Faith, spoke to her so tenderly and truly of his home and his family, that the

girl was entirely won over to perfect confidence in the worthiness of Floy's father.

"You must be a very good man, or so pure and sweet a creature as your daughter couldn't love you so dearly," she said, after listening to one of the girl's letters, which Conway had taken from the breast of his blouse and, with great pride, read aloud to her.

"No, my dear, not a *good* man, but a loving one to my own; and that amounts to the same thing with women, I think."

"Do you? I don't think I could love any one whom I believed to be bad."

"Perhaps not; but if you had loved any one, it would be next to impossible to make you believe that person to be bad."

"Yes; I am sure it would."

"Also, I am certain if you found out their badness *after* you loved people, you would go on loving all the same, maybe more. It is the way with women."

"You seem to know a great deal about women's ways and natures," said Faith, archly.

"I have a right to, my dear, when I've six of my own, counting in the dame. Floy is the youngest of the brood."

The Malay came up to summon the mate and the passenger to supper. It was the cook's business to stay on deck and keep a lookout beyond and about the cutter while the captain and mate took their meals together.

Missing Vernois' dark face and brooding eyes from the company seemed to change the whole aspect of things to Faith Hilary; for, without being able to understand just why it was so, she had felt a natural aversion to the man ever since the night he had revealed his feeling for her so plainly.

She had never afterward met the fervid glow of his glance without a burning sense of indignation, remembering that he had represented her as being his wife, and how he had selfishly urged his love upon her.

She was almost gay this evening in her talk across the table with Graff Conway, and something like the old childish freedom crept into her manner under the protecting influence of the old man's presence.

It must be kept in mind that all the circumstances of the girl's life had been so unexceptional, that her conduct cannot be judged by the fixed rules of conventional propriety.

Apart from the native adaptability of her character, the utter absence of restraint in her early training had tended to develop an elasticity of temperament which may easily account for the rebound her spirits seemed to have made from the saddest dejection to this comparative mirthfulness.

A rosy brightness animated her smiling face, and the furtive eyes of the young captain were fairly dazzled by the freshness of her beauty.

He, too, seemed to have caught the infection of cheer-

fulness from his two companions, who sat on either hand of him at table, for his somber countenance lit up as he joined in the conversation, and now and then his brilliant, sharp-pointed teeth gleamed against the intense blackness of his soft, silky mustache and beard in a way that changed the whole expression of his face.

When the meal was ended, the captain lit his cigar and repaired to the open air to enjoy it. As he was about leaving the cabin, he said, with a graceful inclination of his tall form to Faith :

“Madam must consider the Madcap, and all that it contains, most humbly at her service. Eh, mate?”

“The young lady must know that, not being monsters, we are most loyally hers to command until we place her in better hands.”

“Oh, yes; I feel that you are all very kind, and will take the best care of the poor little waif the sea has sent you.”

Valasco made no reply, but bowed again, and disappeared.

CHAPTER XXIV.

A LAMB AND A WOLF.

Left alone in the cabin with Faith Hilary, the mate of the Madcap takes from his belt a small steel dirk, or poniard, which he makes a pretense of polishing with a scrap of flannel. He next draws a light revolver from his breast, and examines all the chambers, which have been freshly loaded.

The girl watches the performance with naive interest. She says to him :

“Why do you carry such ugly-looking weapons on board your ship?”

“Well, my dear, you see we sometimes fall in with pirates when we reach the Spanish coast, and we get in the habit of carrying these trinkets. On sea and land they’re good things to have handy.”

He took up the glittering revolver from where he had laid it on the cloth of the table, and, handing it over to Faith, said :

“Just feel of it—how light it is! You could slip it in your pocket and never know it was there ; and, as to this little beauty,” taking up the dagger, “why, it could hide in the folds of your dress ever so easily. Do you know,

my dear, I always make my wife and the girls keep these same weapons about them?"

"Why?" asked Faith, now holding out her hand for the poniard, with which the old sailor was playing.

"Well, you see, they live among a lawless set, and a woman should always be provided against danger."

"But so few women could use a pistol with any effect in time of peril."

"Don't you believe that. A robber within a few inches of the hand that's got the pistol ain't hard to hit."

"So few women have the nerve to kill any one, even in self-defense," said Faith, shuddering at the bare idea.

"That's true; but they all have nerve to put a dagger in their own hearts rather than fall into the power of evil men."

"Oh, of course they have."

"And that's why I make my women keep the dagger, so that if the *worst* comes, they've always a way to escape."

The mate fixed his silvery blue eye on the girl's anxious face as he spoke. He saw that she took his meaning. He went on to add:

"You see, my dear, I'm of the same sort of stuff that made the stern old Roman father put a blade through young Virginia's heart, rather than let the bloody Tarquin have his beautiful child. You've read that dark old tale?"

"Yes."

The word came soft and low, for the girl was strangely awed by the turn that Conway's talk had taken.

“Well, I intend to treat you just as I would Floy, if she were here to-night instead of you. If she were, I’d say, ‘Floy, my girl, just you slip this little dirk under your bodice in easy reach of your right hand, and *never* budge an inch without it; and this pistol carry half-cocked, this way, in your pocket, or lay it under your pillow of nights, so that if we should meet a pirate crew, day or night, *you’re* all right.”

“Do you think we shall meet one?” asked Faith, her big eyes all aglow with excitement.

“Oh, no; but it’s always *possible*, and it’s my way to prepare for war in time of peace. I can see it in your eyes that you’d be equal to anything at a pinch, and I don’t mean you shall lack the means of self-defense if you *should* need them aboard the Madcap. Come, let’s see you arm yourself now!”

His voice was very cheery, but a ring of earnest determination sounded under its lighter tones.

Faith smiled a little nervously, but her look was firm, and her white hand steady, as she took the dirk and deftly slipped it, sheathed, within the bodice of her dress.

“There—cleverly done! Now for t’other,” and he handed her the revolver, which he held by its delicate barrel, saying: “Let’s see, now, if you know what you’ve to do when you want to fire.”

“Just pull the hammer-lock so?”

And she cocked the pistol with never a tremor of the little pink thumb.

"*Just* so! How I do like a woman with pluck and good common sense! Now put it back at half-cock."

She did it, having carefully watched him perform the same manipulation previously.

"So. Put the little barker in your pocket, and, mind you, be very careful that the trigger doesn't catch on some of your rigging. It hardly will if you don't take the case off."

He had slipped a leathern cover over the weapon, leaving its handle exposed.

"Remember, now, that whatever you want or wish done, you're to come to me. When you retire, lock your door on the inside, and, whenever it's my turn to sleep, I'll just pull that sofa against the outside of your door, and have one ear and one eye open, as the foxes do; so you needn't be a bit nervous, but rest like a baby."

"How can I thank you for such kind and thoughtful care?" said Faith, with a quiver of her lip, and the grateful tears in her eyes.

"By being as light-hearted and happy as you can. I must go now; but you have your books. I see you read *my* favorite ones the most."

With this the old man made her a salute as if she had been a commodore, and went above to join his captain.

Old Graff Conway had noted well the patient, steady nerve with which Faith had borne the trying ordeal to which she had been subjected, and, although he only knew a portion of her trials, and did *not* know till that

day that the creole had lied about his relations with the girl, he much more than guessed that all the love was on Vernois' side, and that Faith both avoided and mistrusted the man who claimed to be her husband.

But her manner of sustaining herself with such quiet courage had won the mate's profound sympathy and respect; and, now that he knew the extent to which she had been taxed, his admiration knew no bounds.

In providing her against a possible danger, as he had done, he, of course, had quite another enemy than pirates in his mind, but he thought best not to excite her fears by a more definite caution than the one he had just given.

Moreover, he could easily see, from the manner in which she had received his vague expressions and prepared herself against the possible peril, that her own instinctive bravery would suggest all that was needful if the time ever came for her to employ the means of self-protection with which he had furnished her.

For the rest, the old 'sea-lion, as he was fond of calling himself, intended to save her the trouble of guarding both her life and her honor against the desperado, whom he knew to be capable of sacrificing either, if it suited him, and occasion served.

Two or three days went by, as still the cutter was tacking about at the mercy of contrary winds. But, while oppressed with impatience to reach the land and her friends, the life on shipboard had grown far more tolerable to Faith since Julian Vernois no longer composed one of

its elements. Besides this, the father-like devotion of the old sailor went far toward reconciling her to the inevitable delays.

The captain, too, had changed sensibly from his surly, silent ways, and often joined in social chat, or a game of cards with the mate and his fair *protegee*, and Graff Conway was almost inclined to believe that Valasco had meant nothing more than a brutal jest in the ugly words he had spoken concerning the girl, or that he had come to the decision it were wisest not to meddle with anything that Graff Conway chose to protect.

They knew each other well, these two wild "toilers of the sea," but no man ever lets any other man see all the sides of his character.

Hard as she tried to be agreeable and civil to the captain, Faith could not always disguise the shrinking distrust which she felt toward him. A cold, indefinable dread of his scintillating black eyes, and fierce, cruel smile, that had neither mirth nor good nature in it, caused her to have as little as possible to say to the Minorcan. He seemed unaware of such a feeling on her part, and his attentions became less constrained and more generally kind in their outward appearance each day.

One afternoon, about a week after they had left the island, Faith sat under an awning on deck, diligently stitching on a garment of linen which she was fashioning from a supply of stuff so kindly urged upon her acceptance by the mate. This labor of replenishing her ward-

robe had served to fill up the long days very pleasantly. Looking up from her work across the interminable waste of sun-bathed waters, she fancied that her gaze caught the glancing of a sail far out to the westward. She strained her eyes eagerly, and the vision seemed to become more definite. Her heart gave a great throb of hope.

The mate had suggested the idea that they might fall in with a steamship that could take her aboard before the little cutter could reach a port. This thought had entirely overshadowed his previous hint of a pirate ship.

"Mr. Conway! Mr. Conway!" called the girl, in wild excitement, to the mate, who was at the other end of the vessel.

"Yes, miss, I'm here."

"Only come and take a look out this way, for I do believe it is a sail that I see, and it must belong to a big ship, or I could never see it so far."

"Do believe you're right," says the mate, peering over the little hand she pointed in the direction of a shadowy white speck against the golden background of the horizon.

"Wait a bit till I fetch the glass."

When he returned he said :

"Your eyes are younger mine; take a look through that, and then let's hear what you see."

As he spoke he arranged the telescope for her, and presently she exclaimed, with delight :

“Oh, it *is*/ it *is* a sail, and it’s growing bigger, just ever so little bigger, I think!”

The sailor now made his observation, and it sustained Faith’s decision that there was a sail in sight.

“You’re right, by Neptune!”

And he struck his horny hand upon his knee as he said it.

“Mr. Conway, do you think it will come this way?”

There was a piteous fearfulness in the low, sweet tone, and a wistful pain in the lovely, patient eyes that made the old man’s heart ache.

He touched her on the shoulder with one of his fingers, and, in the manner of one making a very mysterious announcement, said:

“Well, if it shouldn’t come this way, dearie, we can go *that* way, and head her off. I’ll soon tell you what her course is.”

The girl sat almost breathless, her eyes fixed—not upon the phantom sail, but on the oracle who watched it through the lenses of a powerful sea-glass. After a space that seemed very long to poor Faith, the mate said, slowly:

“She’s running as fast as wind and steam can send her, due south. By putting on all our sail, and scudding before this westerly wind, we can cut her off at some point before midnight. It will set us considerably more out of our course, but that’s a small matter compared with put-

ting you aboard a steamer, and off this infernal—— Oh! ah! I mean, this dirty little craft.”

“How good of you to think of me first,” said Faith, keeping back her tears with difficulty.

The prospect of relief from this strange life, and the old man’s kindness combined, was almost too much for her.

“Why, child, what else should I think of first, or what difference can a few days more or less make to the Mad-cap? There, little one, don’t you cry, or old Graff Conway won’t be fit to haul a sail this week. There’s nothing takes the stiffening out of a man’s backbone like a woman’s tears.”

“Never fear; I shall not cry; only I was so glad, and you are so good.”

“Oh, not a bit of it, my dear. You put it far too strong. I’m only not quite such a devil as—as I look.”

With this the mate disappeared, and the next minute was heard below in consultation with the captain, without whose consent he did not care to alter the bearings of the cutter.

The captain lay half dressed upon his berth. Conway had wakened him from a sound sleep to explain to him the situation, and ended his recital by saying:

“I suppose we’ll just crowd canvas and make for the steamer’s route.”

“Ten thousand devils! *no!*” growled the Spaniard.

“Look here, cap’n, you don’t mean that?”

"But I do, though! The girl must take her chances with the Madcap. We've lost time enough with her already."

"You know very well it can't hurt us much if we do lose a little time."

"I know that I'm master here, and that I'll have no more fooling."

The captain's eye was savage enough now, and his voice had taken the low muttering sound that belonged to his most brutal and obstinate words. The mate knew that neither argument nor prayer would avail anything.

It was now a question of submission, or of outright defiance of the superior authority which, by right of ownership and rank, belonged to the captain.

As we have said before, Graff Conway had no fear of man or devil, and little enough of God, as his trade and general practice only too well attested. Also his temper was none of the sweetest, when provoked by such insulting and uncalled for brutality as Valasco had just exhibited.

Besides, he was fully determined to keep his word to the girl at all costs, and he did not believe that Valasco would come to open conflict if the point was made. He had his reasons for this conclusion. Acting upon it, he said, while the cold, metallic glitter lit his eye:

"Yes, you're master of the ship, I know, but we'll make for the steamer all the same, or——"

Graff Conway never finished his sentence; for, as he

spoke the first part of it, he coolly turned upon his heel, meaning to suit his action to his words, and set the cutter on the prescribed course.

Scarce had he taken one step forward, when a deadly blow from the captain's mighty arm felled him senseless to the floor.

CHAPTER XXV.

"IN DURANCE VILE."

While fate was dealing thus with poor little Faith Hilary, the terrible distaff was not idle in the fortunes of those with whom her destiny was being strangely and silently interwoven.

One head—the noblest and proudest of all whose history pertains to this romance—lay sorely stricken, and all unconscious of the events transpiring around him.

Lighter than a new-born infant's breath beat the sick pulse through Gordon Warren's once powerful frame, and, looking on him, one might easily mistake the motionless repose of his hueless and sharpened features for the last long sleep.

There had been only one change in the state of affairs at Lucerne since the night when its master had been conducted from its portals to the common jail of —, but this was a mysterious one.

It will be remembered that at the moment when Mathew Croft was about to make his ignominious exit from the hall of Lucerne, a dreadful cry of despair had issued from a woman who overlooked the scene from the landing above the stairway.

Immediately afterward she had fallen to the floor, crouching there, like a frantic, hunted thing, until the cortege had passed out through the vestibule with the prisoner, and the door had clanged to behind them.

The doctor, who remained transfixed with amaze and horror with Leda in the library, rushed out at the sound of that unearthly shriek, that pierced his brain as if it had issued from the depths of a lost soul. He sprang up the stairway, and attempted to lift the slender, groveling form; but, with the wild gesture of a maniac, the woman flung his hands from her, and, casting the end of her black mantle over her head and face, vanished along the dim corridor to a room at the end of it, and, slamming its door behind her swift steps, the doctor heard her draw to the bolts.

"What and who is she?" asked Doctor Wise of Leda, as he returned, pale and shivering with an undefinable sense of terror.

"Only the housekeeper—a poor, half-mad creature," answered Leda, in whose face a vague fear had settled.

As she spoke she passed out from the library, and went to her own room.

All night long Doctor Wise, with Mrs. Warren and

Miss Draper, watched beside the bed of his feverish patient.

The next day it was discovered that the chamber of Mrs. Foster, the housekeeper, was empty. Her bed had not been slept on, nor her effects in any way confused or disturbed. Diligent search and inquiry were at once instituted, but not a trace of the poor, demented fugitive was to be found.

"Possibly she has drowned herself in the lake. It was her habit to take long, lonely walks after nightfall about its shores, and I have often felt a cold, creeping horror at seeing her steal in through the gardens long after midnight, with her black garments clinging in damp folds to her tall, witch-like form."

This was Miss Draper's testimony when the news of Mrs. Foster's strange disappearance was discussed in conclave.

The lake was dragged, but no ghastly shadow of suicide was found to have fallen upon its fair, quiet bosom, that seemed far fitter for the baths of Nymph and Oread than the grim enticement of a pain-driven soul to seek the shores of Acheron beneath its limpid wave.

As for the beautiful mistress of Lucerne, she remained invisible within her own apartments. None knew—and few seemed to care—how it fared with the cold, haughty wife of the accused criminal during those days of mystery that elapsed after Mathew Croft's arrest on the charge of attempting to kill by poison a person whose name and

condition had not been mentioned in the indictment upon which he was arrested.

Leda had troubled herself too little about winning the regard of the community in which she had been born, and where her early childhood had passed, to expect much sympathy from it in her time of need. All of her youth had been spent abroad, and, except occasional and brief visits to their beautiful home in Florida, there were no local associations with her to make her calamity espoused as one of social interest.

While the eminent legal talent and financial success of Mr. Croft had made him a personage of much consequence among the citizens of —, his natural selfishness and coldness estranged from him the confidence of his associates and equals (superiors he did not acknowledge), and attracted the dislike of the lower classes. But talent and success atone for a multitude of grave defects, and, having made a reputation and accumulated a fortune, Mathew Croft seemed sublimely indifferent to the kindly sentiments of his race.

Perhaps a reason for his intense and invariable reserve, which often amounted to moroseness, might be found in the fact of his having some dark passages in his history, the concealment of which an intimacy with others might have imperiled.

There seemed to be less of this austere self-repression in his relations with his young partner, whose career he had materially helped to form, than with any other person.

Yet, even in their most intimate professional association, young Warren was conscious of a thick veil of reticence that curtained his serious inner life from his and every man's sight.

It is very probable that the proud and self-contained reserve of the young clerk, whom he employed as a mere copyist at first, had attracted the notice and approval of Mr. Croft so sensibly as to inspire him with the desire to train this youth of uncommon ability so that he might share with him the arduous duties of a profession that was becoming too active and laborious for Croft's unaided efforts. However this might be, it was evident that Gordon Warren owed his rapid elevation to a place of prominence at the bar of ——— to the countenance and patronage of his sometime preceptor, afterward his partner.

It seemed a little unfortunate for Mathew Croft that now, in his time of sorest need, the only living creature whom he had attached to his interests by material and apparently unselfish services, should be lying locked in the very jaws of death and utterly unconscious of his benefactor's state. Besides his claim upon the personal service of the young lawyer, Croft knew as well as any one that, although so young in his career, there was no other man of his acquaintance to whose oratorical ability he could sooner confide his case than the towering eloquence of the young attorney, whose impassioned appeals and closely-knit arguments had overthrown many of the oldest

and best-trained gladiators in the professional arena of the State.

In his distress Croft forgot or ignored the mortifying revelation which had been made to him concerning Leda's infatuation for Warren. And his own conception of the man's character, strengthened by all he had observed in his deportment toward the women of his family, convinced him that Leda had only spoken the simple truth when she had exonerated Warren from any complicity in her disgraceful efforts to entrap his honor.

On the day succeeding the night of his arrest, Mathew Croft sat before the narrow casement of his cell in the jail. He had just taken some coffee from the coarse meal that had been provided for his breakfast, and had desired the jailer to bring him writing materials, and by no means to admit any visitor whomsoever to his presence without his consent.

The deputy of the prison had placed paper, pen, and ink upon a small table of rude boards near the prisoner's chair, and retired with the untasted breakfast, leaving Mr. Croft to his meditations on the wisest course open to him under the existing circumstances.

Fortunately his legal knowledge, and the astute perceptiveness that had been one of his chief auxiliaries to the reputation he had won, rendered his situation less appalling to him than if ignorance of its possibilities had been added to the mystery in which Rachel's cautious and half-wild revelations had left him.

With that instinct of secrecy that animates a panther in its advances on its prey, Rachel had purposely concealed from Croft the extent and the nature of the evidences of his crime which she claimed to have in her possession. She had only deduced such testimony as convinced him that she was in reality aware of his nefarious deed, and the exact manner of its perpetration, but carefully withheld from him the channel through which she had arrived at the knowledge.

Whether her witnesses were living beings, or only those mute but sometimes more awful accusers that rise up like ghostly fiends, with glittering masks upon their silent faces, to confront the criminal, and which are known as circumstantial evidence, he could not even conjecture.

During that private interview which followed the sudden apparition and horrid revelation by which the outraged and presumably dead wife set the living wife forever asunder from the man who had foully wronged them both, Rachel had evidently convinced Croft that his wisest, safest, and simplest course was to accept her terms without demur.

Some occult power of inspiration seemed to have entered the mind of this dull-brained, commonplace woman, who had for years been the down-trodden slave of one all-absorbing passion.

The moment that silent tyranny of a great, unreasoning love was removed from her faculties, they burned up like smoldered flames, and lit all the horizon of her life

as with a lurid glare that made all things glow before her with magical distinctness.

In her simple intuitiveness, she had managed to confound and baffle the skill, the experience, the cunning, and the malice of this powerful intelligence.

And Mathew Croft now sat lost in a mazy tissue of vague and vain conjectures as to how much power this woman had to harm him.

The most appalling of all the results which might accrue out of the whole affair was the disgrace and the hideousness of standing confessed before the world he had duped for so long a time as a fraud and a villain of the deepest dye. The one acutely sensitive spot in this man's hard nature was his craving after popular applause.

It was this that had stimulated his vanity when he adopted in his youth and extreme poverty the career of itinerant preacher.

When he held a congregation of humble devotees palpitating in the skill of his torrid elocution, he forgot the hardships and poverty of his adopted calling, and enjoyed moments of exquisite delight.

The instant that chance favored him with the opportunity to escape to higher and wider fields through the acquisition of Rachel's fortune, he seized it eagerly, and used it, as we have seen, unscrupulously.

At no time had he ever been addicted to the mere physical pleasures—his passions were more of the mind than the body. For women he never cared, and he soon

found it an intolerable bore and a most exquisite vexation to be burdened with the idolatrous devotion of an ugly, unattractive, and passionate woman, entitled to his constant society and tender consideration.

He was not slow in deciding that at every hazard he must rid himself of this incubus, if he was to realize any satisfaction from her fortune.

We have seen with what success he achieved this fell purpose.

CHAPTER XXVI.

AN UNJUST STEWARD.

Mathew Croft had been employed by Leda's father to conduct several important cases of litigation, and such confidence had the weak and credulous Colonel Morgan reposed in the ability and probity of the then rising lawyer, that he had not only caused Mr. Croft to draw his will, but, at his death, appointed the attorney executor of the document and supervisor in general over his estates and the interests of his wife and young daughter, who was at that time a mere school-girl.

Mrs. Morgan was one of those dependent and fragile natures that gladly repose on the first available support; and while she knew very little of Mathew Croft, and cared

less, when her widowhood rendered it necessary to rely upon the knowledge and judgment of some man in business matters, she readily accepted the appointed guardian of her interests, and never for one moment questioned his integrity or competency.

Remaining abroad with her daughter for years after her husband's death, and subsequently residing in one of the Northern States, of which she was a native, Mrs. Morgan left the conduct of her affairs so entirely to Mr. Croft, that she was not even aware of the extent of her income, or the extravagance of her expenditures, until a very little while before her death.

Although the first years of her married life had been happily spent in Florida, Mrs. Morgan had never been able to assimilate her tastes and feelings with the community of which her husband was a conspicuous member.

Perhaps it was even more difficult then than now for members of the opposite factions, and natives of the different sections of the Union, to harmonize their views of life and social ethics.

Considering the unyielding prejudice of the one section, and the lack of adaptability in the other, it was not then, and is not now, remarkable that an intangible barrier of reserve exists, more obstinate and real than can be found between peoples of a separate and distinct nationality.

Women are even more invincible in political and social differences than men. It therefore suited Mrs. Morgan far better to come occasionally among her husband's rela-

tives and friends as a visitor, than to combat the icy courtesies and ill-concealed mistrust with which she felt she must contend if she made her permanent home in the South; and, being a gentleman of elegant leisure, Colonel Morgan was content to spend the long summers in travel or at a popular resort, flying southward with the swallows at the season when the orange groves and myrtle hedges are at their most attractive stage, and inspiring dreams of the Oriental gardens.

A few months previous to the commencement of this story, Mrs. Morgan had made an unusually heavy draft upon the revenues of her Southern estates for the purpose of refitting her elegant Northern home. To her great astonishment, she was informed by her lawyer that it could not be honored, and that, through her reckless extravagance, her property was entirely bankrupt.

Mrs. Morgan's health, already very miserable, utterly broke under the shock of this cruel news; but, without making it known to her daughter, whom she blindly adored, she decided to make a visit to Florida for the purpose of investigating her affairs.

The day after her arrival, Mr. Croft received a note requesting him to call at Lucerne. He saw no one but Mrs. Morgan, and was appalled to behold her shattered condition of health. She taxed him with singular unkindness in not sooner apprising her of her declining fortunes.

He replied :

“Madam, you forget that I repeatedly admonished you of your extravagance in my letters.”

“Yes; but not once did you curtail my receipts of money.”

“On the contrary, madam, as was my duty and pleasure, I frequently responded to your demands by straining my own credit. In the very last instance, the remittance you received was from my private purse.”

“Why, in Heaven’s name, did you not speak plainly, and say that I was being ruined?”

“My dear Mrs. Morgan, it seemed to me that, in dealing with a lady of culture and intellect, I said enough, and more than enough; and when I found there was no retrenchment of your expenses, I naturally concluded that you had in reserve resources of which I was ignorant, and of which I had no right to inquire.”

“Oh, sir, I cannot help but feel that you have done me and my child a very cruel injustice by this incomprehensible *delicacy*.”

There was a bitter intonation on the last word that sounded very like sarcasm from the refined lips of the frail invalid.

“If so, I have erred through consideration for your feelings, and respect for my dead friend’s memory.”

“Would it not have been kinder to that friend had you used less agreeable measures to protect his widow and orphan against the poverty that seems now our portion?”

“Possibly so, madam ; but I acted for the best.”

“What is done is done.” said Mrs. Morgan, with cold politeness, adding : “You will oblige me by making out a full and complete statement of all my affairs since you have had control of them. I shall employ Mr. Craig to investigate and close up my business immediately.”

The clear, soft eye of Mrs. Morgan rested full on Croft’s face during the last remarks. She thought she detected a startled expression under the practiced reticence of his countenance ; but he merely bowed, and replied :

“As you please, madam.”

He prepared to withdraw, but paused a moment at the door to say :

“Perhaps you have overlooked the fact that Mr. Craig was one of your husband’s bitter enemies and political opponents, and that the transferring of the management of an insolvent estate to his, or any other hands, becomes a question of fees and costs, which I doubt if you are prepared to discharge.”

With this Parthian shaft, Croft bowed low, and, wearing an air of injured innocence and abused friendship, he went away.

Although so cool in his treatment of Mrs. Morgan’s threat to employ Mr. Craig to investigate his management of her affairs, it was the Spartan nerve in receiving a deadly stab.

Elmore Craig was the *natural* enemy—to use the idea in a professional sense—of Mathew Croft. This gentle-

man had ranked first in point of talent and seniority at the bar of the State when Croft began the practice of law in ——. The indefatigable zeal, energy, tact, and superior abilities of the interloper did much to retrench both the practice and the popularity of Mr. Craig; besides this, Croft had failed to render the elder man that deference which his age and position entitled him to receive from the junior members of the bar. A silent but bitter animosity had subsisted between these two from the first, and time had not softened it.

To have his management of Mrs. Morgan's property looked into and called to account by this man, would have been an insufferable thought to Croft, even had there been nothing to conceal from the public eye.

But, counting on the ignorance of business and confiding disposition of his fair client, Croft had so directed events as to put the estates of the late Colonel Morgan in such a condition that, with an appearance of great liberality and forbearance on his part, they must, in the end, pass into his possession, as the just equivalent of repeated advances of money made on crops that were never raised. It would be tedious to explain the means by which all this had been accomplished. He had taken care that his accounts should wear a correct aspect when examined by the unprofessional eye of the widow, and he had never calculated on any investigation of them.

On his return from the interview with Mrs. Morgan, he revolved the situation most carefully in his inventive brain,

and, long ere he reached his office, he had decided on his measures to prevent any third party from meddling with the Lucerne property. At an early hour of the following day he called, uninvited, at the villa.

Mrs. Morgan received him with great coldness. Croft, on the other hand, wore an air of the most profound sympathy and regard, touched with tender deference.

He opened the conversation thus :

“Dear madam, I can well comprehend how, in the pain and mortification you must have suffered under the announcement of your business trouble, you should have done me the injustice which your words betrayed in our conference yesterday. I do not complain of it; on the contrary, I excuse and understand it. I feel, too, that I may deserve your reproaches in part. It would surely have been best had I nerved myself long ago to the disagreeable duty, which, at last, became inevitable, instead of supplying from my own means the large sums which, of course, could not be always forthcoming to meet the improvident demands which you, in your ignorance of affairs, made upon your property.”

Here Mrs. Morgan fixed a look of proud resentment upon him, as she said :

“It is the second time you have reminded me of your beneficent *charity*, Mr. Croft; but I imagine you know me better than to suppose I will not repay you every farthing you advanced, if it requires the last acre of land, and even the last trinket I possess.”

"Pardon me, my friend, if I hurt your pride by recurring to so small a service in comparison to the magnitude of my desire to serve you. It is necessary, in order to explain other things, that I should have dwelt for a moment upon that unimportant fact."

"Go on, sir, if you please."

"There are circumstances of great delicacy connected with the duties imposed on me by your husband's will, that made me shrink from having any third party in any way concerned with his property. I deemed it better to constitute myself the factor in this business, and, instead of procuring advances of money from other sources, to assume the risks in my own person of taking the lands, if need be, in exchange for the funds."

"I think I can understand *that* part of it," said the lady, with ever so light a curl of her delicate lips; "but what are the 'circumstances of great delicacy,' which render it necessary that no 'third party' must be 'concerned in the property?'"

Croft cast his eyes to the ground, and seemed to suffer the keenest embarrassment. At length he said, with reluctance:

"Dear Mrs. Morgan, my loyalty to the dead demands my silence, even at the expense of your displeasure."

A white indignation overspread the already pale cheek of the frail creature, and she exclaimed, with much heat:

"Mr. Croft, dare you insinuate that my husband confided to you any trust that you cannot mention to *me*?"

"Alas! yes, madam; it is even so."

"I would not believe it though an angel re-echoed your words."

"I do not blame you for saying so; on the contrary, I honor you the more."

Utterly exasperated by this show of compassionate sympathy, Mrs. Morgan rose to her feet, trembling like a leaf in a tempest.

Her lips were bloodless and her voice shaken, as she said:

"I shall prove that you have basely slandered the memory of the dead. I shall have an investigation made of every clause in his will, every circumstance of his life, that I may die with the satisfaction of having established the falseness of your assertion."

"First read this paper, which is written and signed by your husband, sealed with his own hand, with his own signet ring, and left in the package containing his will. You observe it is addressed to me, and marked 'confidential.'"

Her hand shook so violently that she could scarcely hold the paper. It was all as he had said.

She opened and was about to read it, when Croft rose and interposed his hand between her eyes and the page of closely-written paper, bearing the unmistakable chirography—a delicate, irregular handwriting—of Lambert Morgan.

He said, as he did this:

“Dear Mrs. Morgan, for your own and your child’s sake, *do* not read that paper. I was wrong to give it to you—wrong even to speak of it. Yet I felt bound to stay your mad purpose of setting the curious scrutiny of a stranger at work among documents that must surely lead up to *this* one. For Heaven’s sake, give me back the paper, and rest content with my assertion that I have acted with the utmost discretion for your *best* interests.”

“Oh, my God! Why—why did you say aught to cloud my faith in *him*? It is a cruel crime; it is worse than if you had stabbed me to the heart!”

“It was the last and only resource to protect his memory from shame. Heaven knows I did not desire to give you this anguish.”

“Ah, I see—I see it all now! It was behind *this* fortress of defense that you entrenched yourself to ruin me.”

“Good Heaven, madam, do you rave?”

“Mathew Croft, the world names you a hard, unscrupulous, self-seeking man. I know little enough about either the theory or the practice of your calling; but instinctively I felt, from the moment of reading your last letter to me, that I had become the victim of that cupidity with which the world charges you; and every word, tone, and look of yours during our personal interviews has only fixed this feeling in my heart. It shall be as you say. I will not profane the sacred ashes of the man I loved by learning what he chose to conceal from me. I shall

meet him soon. God deal with you according to your manner of fulfilling the trust reposed in your hands by the dead!"

As she concluded this solemn sentence, she fell into one of those long, trance-like swoons, similar to the one that succeeded to her recital of these facts to Gordon Warren.

From that time her strength had been rapidly waning until he saw her.

She had tacitly acquiesced in all that Croft required of her in the settlement of her ruined estate, and her signature to the document which led to Warren's acquaintance with Lucerne and its inmates was the last of the transactions to which she had subscribed her name.

The fact that Gordon Warren had demanded of Croft a suspension of the sale of Lucerne until his return from the West, was quite sufficient to convince Croft that Mrs. Morgan had said something to arouse the young man's suspicions with regard to the professional administration of Lambert Morgan's will.

Mr. Croft decided to put a final quietus on his partner's scruples by marrying the girl Leda.

It was an alternative that was by no means attractive to the cold, mercenary heart of the lawyer; but, once embarked in the matrimonial adventure with so beautiful and seductive a woman as Leda, Croft was surprised into a passion for the girl, the ardor of which surpassed all his self-knowledge.

Of the subsequent course of events the reader is already aware.

It was of all these things together, and a thousand other links in the long chain of his life's vicissitudes, that Mathew Croft sat brooding before the grated window of his prison-cell.

Who knows but that, above all other reminiscences of this checkered retrospection, the solemn adjuration of the woman whose wifely faith he had so terribly blighted filled his ear and brain to the exclusion of all hope :

“God deal with you according to your manner of fulfilling the trust reposed in your hands by the dead !”

CHAPTER XXVII.

A MIDNIGHT VISITANT.

The prisoner turned at length from his depressing reflections, and addressed himself to the task of writing two letters. One of these was to a lawyer of some ability residing in the city ; the other was directed to a distinguished legal personage in one of the adjoining States.

These letters were duly dispatched, and in the afternoon Mr. Fields, one of his compeers at the bar of —, called in response to the former of these epistles. Informing himself of Mr. Fields' willingness to be associated with

the celebrated Mr. Pearson, of Alabama, Croft proceeded to put his counsel in possession of the case, assuming that it was "a tale told by an idiot, signifying nothing," but, at the same time, admitting that there might be danger in the woman claiming to be his former wife, provided she had been clever enough to supply herself with well-authenticated testimony, shrewdly interwoven with circumstantial evidence.

Croft felt it would be safest to proceed with the utmost caution, reserving any confessions for the *dernier resort*. He advised Mr. Fields to go at once to Lucerne and confer with the two women, Mrs. Foster and Miss Draper, concerning the whereabouts of their employer, "Rachel Croft, as she persists in calling herself."

"But, my dear sir, it seems to me that we encounter a very criminating fact at the outset—namely, your acquiescence in the charge preferred against you by this mad woman, by assuming the charge of her daughter, and placing her household under the supervision of her two spies."

"We can deal with that easily enough, Mr. Fields. There is nothing remarkable in a man of delicate sensibilities submitting to the most dreadful impositions rather than encounter the disgusting exposure of his private affairs in a public prosecution for a crime of which he is innocent. When you reflect that I was then but a week married to a beautiful and notable woman of high social connections, whose whole future must have been clouded

by such a miserable farce as this persecution is like to prove, you cannot wonder that I accepted any means of escape from it."

"But your wife, was she not aware of the charge made against you by this crazy woman—and must not *her* tacit acceptance of the situation seem utterly incomprehensible to the community?"

Croft had his answer ready. Without a shade's change of expression upon his evil countenance, he said :

"But, of course, Mrs. Croft did *not* know. That she should remain in ignorance of the black charge was included in my agreement with the woman Rachel."

"How was the advent of the girl, and the two additional members of your household, explained to her satisfaction?"

"Oh, easily enough ; my young ward confided to me by the letter of an old friend, written on his death-bed. As to the two other women, they simply answered advertisements made for governess and housekeeper. Nothing more simple."

The face of the advocate wore a perplexed expression, and he said nothing for some time. When he did speak, there was an embarrassment in his manner.

"It is needless for me to admonish *you*, Mr. Croft, of the wisdom of giving a candid and unreserved statement of your case in the beginning. As a lawyer of great experience, you know perfectly well how many complications may arise from the counsel's ignorance of *facts*!"

"You are simply to proceed under my instructions, sir, leaving consequences to me."

The lawyer rose and prepared to take leave, as there seemed no further discussion of the case required at present.

He had already received his client's directions concerning certain preliminaries.

Mr. Croft said :

"Will you do me the kindness to call immediately upon Mrs. Croft, and place in her own hands this letter?"

"Certainly. Do you expect me to bring you a reply?"

"Probably she will desire you to do so. You will, at all events, call again on your return, and report the results of your visit?"

"With pleasure. Is there no other way in which I can serve you, sir?"

"No other, I think."

The advocate withdrew, and again Mathew Croft was left to his solitude.

He had taken one false step already, by denying Leda's knowledge of Rachel's visit to him.

He counted on Warren's silence—if, indeed, the poor fellow should be alive at the time—about having seen the strange woman in company with Leda and himself; but, even should this fact come out in the testimony, there was still Leda's denial against Rachel's assertion of a mutual understanding, for nothing had transpired in presence of Warren.

In his letter to Leda, Croft had enjoined upon her an absolute refusal to give any testimony whatever until compelled by the law to do so upon the witness-stand in open court, and, above all, to adhere to her denial of any acquaintance with Rachel's accusations, and his subsequent compact with her.

He counted upon Leda's compliance, not because of her interest in his acquittal so much as her own desire to shield herself from the ignominy of having been a party to the horrid compact that must forever disgrace and ostracize from society the woman who could lend herself to such baseness.

His chief anxiety at present was to learn where Rachel had concealed herself, and how she intended to proceed in the prosecution.

Not once did his thoughts turn with pity or compunction to the anguish of the bereaved mother, whose soul must be one seething abyss of torture for the unhappy fate of her child—the one thing that bound her wretched life to the world.

Now that the business of his interview with his lawyer was over, Croft's ideas were in some degree released from the painful concentration with which he had been dwelling on his condition, and his thoughts wandered to external objects.

As he cast his eyes round the gloomy little cell, noting its dingy walls, where great black spiders hung in their webs, furnishing a significant topic of meditation, his

glance encountered a line written in charcoal upon the discolored plastering.

It was only a man's name, with the day of the month and date of year annexed.

"Joel Bradwell, Friday, March 10th, 18—. Amen!"

A mortal shuddering crept through the man's whole body as his gaze fastened on this scrawled sentence on the prison wall.

He fancied he experienced a sensation like unto the dread of the Eastern monarch when he looked upon the phantom writing traced upon his banquet hall.

Was this commonplace line, this conjunction of ordinary words, a fell prognostic of his fate, sure as the mystical "Mene tekem," before which Belshazzar trembled?

Mathew Croft was recalling a scene full of tragic horror, in which the man, Joel Bradwell, a brutal murderer, had been led from the gates of this same jail—and he now believed from this very cell—to meet his just doom upon the gallows before the howling, execrating masses of an outraged populace.

The train of gloomy reflections engendered by this discovery of the celebrated criminal's name traced over his head was interrupted by the return of Mr. Fields.

"Have you a letter for me, sir?" asked Croft, nervously; for he indulged the hope that in his hour of calamity Leda's cold heart might have been touched to sympathy.

"No, sir. Mrs. Croft simply asked me to say that she comprehended all that you had written."

Croft shut his tusk-like upper teeth hard down upon his ashen lip—his mortification was profound. Mr. Fields added :

"The housekeeper, Mrs. Foster, has mysteriously disappeared. Careful and diligent search has been made after her without the smallest success. Not a trace can be found. It is supposed that her disordered brain may have suffered a fatal shock under the excitement of your arrest, which she is said to have witnessed with remarkable demonstrations of horror, and that she fled from the house during the night, and must have drowned herself. The lake has been dragged to no purpose, but the river is quite near enough at hand for a maniac to have reached its swift, strong current."

"And Miss Draper?"

"Says she is in perfect ignorance of the present locality of the woman Rachel's residence; that the last letter announcing her departure for Europe was received only a few days after Miss Draper's arrival in your family, and that not a word indicating her future address had been given."

"Mrs. Foster must have possessed the information we require."

"Possibly; but it has disappeared with herself. We must grope in the dark as best we can, waiting for the developments on the other side."

Mr. Fields took his leave again, and repaired to his law office, where he frequently worked until late into the night. At eleven o'clock, when he was about to put out his lamp upon the baize-covered table of the office, there sounded a light, uncertain rap on the street door.

It was a strange hour for a visitor or client to call. Opening the door with some curiosity, he was met at the threshold by the tall, slender figure of a woman, robed and closely veiled in black.

CHAPTER XXVIII.

MORAL LEPROSY.

At an early hour on the morning that succeeded to the events of the last chapter, the prisoner, Mathew Croft, was disturbed in his late slumbers to receive a sealed letter from Mr. Fields.

With some eagerness, Mr. Croft opened the envelope, hoping to find some item of intelligence bearing on his affairs. What he did find was as follows :

“May 14th, 18—.

“SIR:—It has become my painful duty to decline further connection with your case. This determination is unalterable. It is needless for me to add that the confidences which transpired during our interviews of yesterday are protected by the sacred seal of our profession, and that they shall be guarded as my own honor.

“I remain,

JOHN D. FIELDS.

“To Mathew Croft, Esq.”

This was all—not a word of sympathy, not a syllable of regret or explanation—simply this abrupt withdrawal from his service.

Mr. Croft had chosen this man from among the several prominent lawyers with whom he had been associated in practice, because of his sound sense and shrewd powers of observation, and because his indigent circumstances would be a stimulus added to professional pride in a case where the fee was made contingent, as he had purposely made that which he proposed as a recompense for *successful* effort in his cause. The eloquence and legal learning of the associated counsel, Mr. Pearson, were to surmount the more laborious preparations of the details of the case. Mr. Croft relied more upon himself than either or both of them. Of the two men, Fields, who was on the spot, and upon whom the prisoner relied for collecting information, and watching the opposing counsel, was the more important, and it was not without great annoyance that Croft digested the contents of the note.

“Shall you send a reply, sir?” asked the deputy officer of the jail, whose duty it was to attend on the prisoner and comply with all reasonable and lawful demands.

“No.”

The officer withdrew; and, after casting about for the best plan to pursue in this unlooked-for and unaccountable emergency, Croft decided to remain passive for the present, awaiting the arrival of Mr. Pearson.

Meanwhile, a public announcement of his arrest, and a

general statement of the crime with which he was charged, appeared in the daily papers, but by whose authority was not known beyond the sanctum of the editors. Dispassionately as the paragraphs were written, there seemed to lurk so cold-blooded and horrible a significance in every line of the brief but tragic narrative, that it fell upon the community like the shock of some newly-perpetrated outrage.

The secret mistrust which many had harbored against the accused, and the open enmity of others, now broke out into loud execrations. Not one of all who heard or read the strange account of Rachel Croft's mournful fate, proposed interment, and subsequent resuscitation, and the dreary history of her poor life up to the moment of her apparition before her husband and *his other wife*, could take with him or her from the narrative one sentiment of pity for the selfish villain who thus had repaid her wild worship, and doomed her to years of pain more dreadful than the fate he had designed for her.

Thus was the public sentiment made to prejudge the criminal, and all compassion alienated from the prisoner.

Of the nature and form of the evidence to be brought forward in the trial there was, of course, no mention made in the publication of the facts therein stated.

At the close of it appeared this paragraph :

“It is affirmed that Messrs. Pearson, of Alabama, and Fields, of this city, are to appear for the accused. Our venerable fellow-citizen, the Nestor of our Bar, Mr. El-

more Craig, has been employed as assistant counsel for the State."

This significant issue from the local press was submitted to Mr. Croft's perusal twenty-four hours after his arrest, and previous to the withdrawal of Mr. Fields from his case.

By the end of the week Mr. Croft received a message from Mr. Pearson to say that he had just arrived at the hotel at a late hour, and much worn with travel, but would call upon his client at ten o'clock the following day.

It may be imagined that the prisoner awaited the hour in no placid frame of mind.

The solitude, confinement, and utter ignorance of all that might have transpired in the interval since his arrest, had shaken the iron nerve of this man, whose moral metal had been so highly tempered during the varied experiences of his life. His hard, muscular face, over which he ordinarily held such supreme control, had taken an expression of intense repression. Its strong lines had grown rigid, lest in some unguarded moment they might betray the secret emotions of the dark soul which they masked.

Mr. Croft had made his toilet with unusual care and elegance to receive the great lawyer.

Despite his repulsiveness of countenance, there was an air of distinction about this man that at once evidenced a strain of patrician blood running in the darker currents. His points, too, denoted purity of race. Small and

shapely feet, beautiful and delicately kept hands, that were white as a girl's, and a proud calm of manner when he wished.

Each and all of his personal advantages were displayed to the best effect on the present occasion, and he saw paring his pointed nails with a slender pen-knife as the clock near by chimed the hour of ten.

Half an hour went by, and Mr. Croft was growing white and nervous. Still fifteen minutes more, and he rose and paced the narrow space fretfully. Eleven o'clock struck, and shortly after steps approached his cell.

This time it was the jailer proper who entered, and presented, not the expected personage, but a small sealed envelope. Mr. Croft read the inclosure :

“May 15th.

“MATHEW CROFT, ESQ.:—Permit me to express my regret at the disappointment which this note will doubtless add to your already disagreeable position, but I find myself obliged to relinquish the idea of defending your case.

“Yours, etc.

JAMES E. PEARSON.”

Without looking up from the letter, Mr. Croft made a sign to the jailer to depart, saying, quietly :

“No answer.”

What did it all mean? Was the brand of Cain upon him, so that every man's hand was against him? Had the awfulness of the crime with which he was charged rendered his very name an abomination, and so polluted the atmosphere about him that no living creature, save the functionaries whose business it was, came nigh his dismal dungeon?

Verily, it seemed as if a solemn ban of excommunication from the sympathies, as from the society, of his kind had been pronounced against him before his time.

CHAPTER XXIX.

THE WOLF AND HIS PREY.

There was an invisible witness to the discussion between the captain and the mate of the Madcap, which ended in the fierce Minorcan's springing to his feet at the moment when his comrade turned to leave the state-room, and sending his ponderous, brawny arm out with a momentum that would have laid a stouter man than the old sailor prone and senseless.

Hearing high words between the two officers of the vessel, the Malay had set the door of his kitchen slightly ajar, in order to observe the better what passed between them.

Although, as has already been stated, the Oriental spoke no tongue save his own, that did not signify that he understood no other, nor that, in a pinch, he was unable to convey his ideas very intelligibly by means of certain words and fragmentary sentences that he had collected in a secret *repertoire* of his sagacious and cunning brain against the time of need. It suited him to have Captain Valasco

believe that with himself alone he (the Malay) was capable of any verbal communication.

Standing at the crevice in the door-way, the cook watched with a cat-like vision the scene that was transpiring just a few feet from his post of observation. He comprehended sufficient of what was said to learn the whole gist of the matter; and when he saw the agile leap of the young sailor, followed by the fall of the mate, he drew his conclusions pretty correctly as to the real nature of the captain's motives in rendering the mate incapable of further opposition to his designs.

Valasco bent a moment over the prostrate form of his comrade. He had directed his blow with skillful accuracy, so as to benumb the consciousness without attacking the life of his victim. He felt very sure that before half an hour the tough old seaman would be recovered from his present condition of insensibility, and he proceeded at once to avail himself of it to put the obstinate old man where he would be powerless to interfere with his actions for as long a time as he chose to be rid of him.

To bind fast the arms of Graff Conway was only a moment's work for the powerful captain, who then stepped to the door of the kitchen, and with a sign summoned the Malay.

Together they bore the mate down to the ship's locker, where he was securely fastened up. Valasco explained to the cook that it was the just penalty of insubordination on the part of the mate, and that he would be released in

due season. The Malay affected perfect satisfaction with the arrangement, and returned to his own post. The huge key that secured the mate's prison was in the captain's pocket.

After retiring to his state-room, and refreshing his toilet a little, the captain went up on deck. There sat Faith Hilary, still intent on watching the distant sails through the sea-glass.

She heard a man's step approaching her, but concluded it was the mate returning, and, without shifting her posture or turning her head, she said:

"Have you altered her course, Mr. Conway?"

"The vessel's all right, but it is not Mr. Conway," answered the deep, slow tones of the captain.

"Ah! excuse me, sir; I thought Mr. Conway had come back to tell me about setting the vessel on the right track to overtake the steamer yonder."

The girl's voice had changed suddenly from its free and confidential tone to one of constrained courtesy, and she smiled nervously as she looked up to the swart, sinister face of Valasco, who now stood beside her. One of his hands was cast behind him, the other thrust into the leathern belt that confined his waist, and a smile which he intended should inspire confidence, but which was full of treachery, played over the pale-red lips. He said:

"Mr. Conway has been taken suddenly ill, but not until he had explained to me about overtaking the steamship. I'll manage all that as well as he could."

"You say he is ill?" cried Faith, in alarm, and with a dull sinking of the heart that was to herself inexplicable.

"Yes, but I hope there's not much amiss with him. He'll be out again shortly."

Faith said nothing, but turned her eyes more wistfully than ever to the white speck on the far horizon. The light was beginning to fade, and she could just discern the object of such vital interest to her.

"Let me take a look at her," said Valasco, dropping on one knee beside Faith, and putting his eye to the glass. "How soon did the mate think we might intercept her course?" he asked, while gazing through the telescope.

"He thought about or before midnight," answered she, timidly, and moving the folds of her dress a little aside from where they swept against the kneeling form of the captain.

"I think it may be sooner, as the wind is now higher than ten minutes ago."

"Oh! I hope so. I hope it so much!"

The ejaculation sounded almost like a prayer.

Faith had clasped her small hands over her knee, and bent slightly forward, straining her eyes to the westward, where the ship was.

The keen breeze lifted and played with her silky hair, and the warmth of the evening had flushed her soft face, and the dark hues of the sea were reflected in her dreamy, anxious eyes.

The bright, fresh lips were slightly apart, and this gave

an expression of more intense sensibility to her exquisite face. Evangeline upon her rock was not lovelier nor sadder than this fair creature.

But the pathetic meanings of her beauty were all lost upon the fierce, passionate heart of the dark Spaniard at her feet, who thought only of her exquisite womanhood that he had been daily watching with an increasing interest.

It had even occurred to Valasco that he might win the heart of this pure pearl, and to his sensuous admiration had been added a tinge of romantic passion that he had never yet conceived for any woman.

Prey, and not conquest, had been the order of the hardy, bold seaman's loves.

What if, like the adventurous pirates of old sea tales, he might win him a bride in this delicate blossom that the waves had borne to his bark from the "Land of Flowers?"

In the roughest and rudest natures some chord lies hushed and waiting for the *one* touch that can evoke its notes to harmony with the diviner music of the higher life.

Amid his wild career of bloodshed, and pillage, and general lawlessness, this evil soul had never till now caught a glimpse of that starry radiance that, like a halo, encircled the ideal woman to whom a man's spirit renders a homage as sincere as the ardent desires that thrill his mortal being in her presence.

This feeling, as inexpressible as it was new to him, had invested Faith Hilary with a certain dignity, which, added to the sanctity that virgin purity exhales about itself, had protected the girl from any overtures of admiration that could offend her delicacy—albeit the glowing eyes of the Spaniard occasioned her an invariable sensation of dread.

Diez Valasco had good blood as well as bad in his veins, and all that was good in him felt the charm of kneeling there beside that lovely maiden, with her white fluttering skirts brushing his knee, like the snowy wing of some bright angel.

He busied himself with the glass as long as possible, in order to retain his posture beside her. But it seemed less pleasing to the girl; for she rose, and, letting her work slip from her lap, began to walk slowly across the narrow deck, always watching the far-away sail.

Valasco's black brows contracted. He seemed conscious of her avoidance, and his evil nature resented it.

"What harm could it have done her to be still and let me dream of happiness?" he said within his heart.

Dropping the glass, he too rose, and standing with his back to the deck-rail, and his arms crossed over his massive chest, he watched Faith for a moment till he saw his gaze had brought the red spot to her sunny cheek. Then he said, the sunless half-smile showing the sharp edges of his glittering teeth:

"Is madam, then, so weary of us that she welcomes

the care of strange people in preference to the friends that have saved her life?"

"Oh, sir, don't put it that way, please! But only think how anxious you would be—if you were me—to—to—go on board a ship that could take you to land *in spite of the winds.*"

"Is your home in Florida?"

"Yes; at Lucerne, near ——."

"Is there some one there whom you love very much?"

"Yes; my governess and a friend."

"Is the friend a man?"

"Yes; a noble, good man."

"Young or old?"

"Oh, not any older than you are, I would say."

"Do you care for him more than Mr. Vernois?"

Faith's face, that hitherto had been quite placid, and even pleased in speaking of the absent friends, here grew scarlet at the mention of Vernois, remembering what he had said of her to this man.

She had already informed the old sailor that his statement was cruel and false, but she had not cared to speak on so delicate a subject to the captain.

It seemed now that she could not help justifying herself at all hazards; she answered, with a proud, defiant light on her face:

"Yes; I care a thousand times more for him. I *hate* Mr. Vernois; he was cruel to tell you that—that I was his wife. It was not, and never shall be true."

She then made a brief statement of the facts which had led to her accident, and mentioned her real position, and the name of her guardian to the captain.

“Who, then, is this other that you ‘love a thousand times more’ than Vernois?”

“Mr. Warren; he is grand!”

“Is he married?”

“Oh, dear, no!”

“Then I suppose he is in love with you?”

“Good gracious, no! He treats me just as he would his little sister, if he had one; and if I had forty brothers, I’d never be so fond of them all put together as I am of him.”

“No?”

Valasco was smiling in a pleased way, for the artless candor of Faith’s enthusiastic praise assured him that she, at least, was not “in love” with Mr. Warren.

“Is there any one in the world for whom you care more than for him?”

“Yes; my mother, of course.”

“Where is your mother?”

“At the German baths—I do not know which of them.”

“Who else is there, after your mother and this grand friend of yours, whom you love very much indeed?”

“Only two other people in the whole world—my old nurse and Miss Draper, my sweet, kind little governess. How I wish I could see her now!”

The captain was silent for a little while, and, though his lids were cast down, he still saw, passing and repassing before him, the fairy-footed delicate girl.

The twilight had fallen while they talked, and the first stars were throbbing through the purple haze that veiled the unclouded sky. No longer the distant sail was visible on the dim horizon, for the grayness of the evening shut it out.

After a long silence the captain said :

“But suppose you could see some one who loved you better than all of those you have spoken of, and a million like them, could love you?”

“I would still long for them, and only them. Their love is enough for me.”

She spoke the words slowly and sadly. Evidently she had taken no personal inference from Valasco's significant question.

After a few turns more she went below, and remained in her state-room until tea-time, half an hour later.

CHAPTER XXX.

A VULTURE ON GUARD.

“You will keep the ship steadily in the course on which she is now running, and not stir from the decks until I bid you, no matter if it is the whole night. You understand me?”

This was substantially what Valasco said to the Malay in his own tongue, whom he put in charge of the cutter at the moment of going down to join Faith in the cabin for their evening meal.

The copper-hued visage of the East Indian showed no more interest in what was said to him than if he had been only a machine, instead of a man. He simply made a stolid sign of comprehension and assent, and assumed his post in silence.

“Will you come out to tea, Miss Hilary?” said the captain, for the first time addressing Faith by her name, and rapping gently on the door of her state-room.

She appeared a moment later, and, as she placed herself at the table, said :

“Where is Mr. Conway? Is he still too ill to sup with us?”

“He seems easier now. I’ve just seen him, and, as he is sleeping soundly, I would not disturb him. Sleep is the best physic, after all, when one can get hold of it.”

"I hope he will soon be out. I miss his kind face and cheery talk."

"Yes, the mate is a good fellow; but I could manage very well without his, or any man's company, as long as I have yours."

The words were rather bluntly spoken, but deferential enough, yet they made Faith so intensely uncomfortable that she became nervous.

The consciousness of the dark, warm glance of the saturnine young captain playing over her did not tend to put her at her ease under his bluff compliment, but she made the best of it by seeming not to have heard it. She said:

"You have known each other a long time, have you not?"

"Yes; a matter of five years, I think. Is your tea all right?"

"Thank you, yes. How did you come to be friends and comrades? I don't think you seem to be the least alike in disposition."

"Perhaps that's why we are friends. It is a long story, but, if you'd like, I'll tell you how it came to pass that Conway and I own the Madcap together."

"Yes; I'd be glad to hear, if you don't mind telling it."

There was a degree of eager interest in Faith's tone, which came from the pleasure she felt in any impersonal topic that would divert Valasco's attention from herself;

but, man like, he construed her enthused manner to the advantage of his own vanity.

The captain was not a bad talker when animated by a congenial theme. His voice was good, and excitement lit his sinister and somber countenance into a certain satanic beauty, which is to the last degree captivating to admirers of the brigand order of man.

Faith Hilary was far from belonging to this type of woman, nevertheless her imaginative fancy was deeply arrested by the daring tale which the bold seaman narrated, weaving some of the most thrilling facts of his eventful life very cleverly into a romantic tissue of incident that placed him rather in the light of a fate-driven Orestes than the bad, unscrupulous man that he was.

Possibly he painted his life history with the colors of his own palliative sophistries, which, no doubt, represented his deeds to his own mind less as willful crimes than the evil chances of a desperate calling to which he had been predestined.

It seemed to Faith, as she listened, that it was a legend of fiction, with a wild sea-robber for its hero, that was being told by the captain.

Sometimes she held her breath, and turned pale with horror, as he portrayed the perils by land and sea through which he had escaped death in its ghastliest shapes, and in which he had been *forced* to inflict it on those who endangered his own safety.

Whether by design or not, the captain spun out his

story to such length that the evening passed far into the night ere it was ended. Faith was still seated at the table; her head leaned upon her hand, and her eyes, wide with wonder as a child's, watching the flickering lights of passionate feeling that played over the Spaniard's features as he talked. He had lighted and smoked out two cigars while he went through with his recital; and sometimes Faith fancied that his flushing, tawny face and glittering eyes were the likeness of an evil spirit, seen thus through the vapors of smoke that he puffed from his handsome lips.

In the gentlest and most timid of women there is a deep-hidden passion for daring courage in the opposite sex; and they will remain spell-bound by the deadliest tales of horror, of this grand masculine quality of intrepidity, however reckless be the underlying theme.

Perhaps the intense interest which the girl's rapt face betrayed led the bold outlaw to believe that he had awakened her fancy and touched her heart by his tragic narrative. Evidently his own feelings were wrought upon strangely by the combination of influences that environed him. The wild scenes that he had passed in review, the stillness of the deep night, the beautiful face of his fair auditor, his romantic passion for her, her utter helplessness to defend herself against it, if he chose to urge his love on her acceptance—all tended powerfully to inflame the undisciplined spirit of the rover.

At last he could prolong the story no further. He cast

the glowing end of his cigar from his sinewy brown fingers, and, rising, stood before the girl like a towering impersonation of some lawless Viking of the ancient time, the strength of whose hand constituted the extent of its claim to any prey that it closed on.

A slight shiver, as of some mysterious awe, swept through Faith's delicate limbs.

Bending a little toward her, and resting one of his mighty hands on the table, the captain said, in a voice that shook a little :

"It has been said, in song or story, that women like you are the angels whom God sends in human shape upon the earth to redeem lost souls—such as mine."

Faith shuddered and closed her eyes, as if some vision full of terror had been presented to her sight. He went on, after a brief pause :

"I have shown you what my past has been. At this moment I feel myself poised between two destinies, and it remains with you to decide which of them I shall follow. With your heaven-like smile to light me, I feel I may yet retrieve my way, and become an honest, useful man. Let but that hope shine on me, and I will kneel before you as a sinner to his guardian saint, and so reverence you until we can stand together before the holy altar for the marriage blessing."

He paused again; the low and solemn earnestness of his tone being hushed, left the silence of the waning night more oppressive than ever. His eyes gleamed on the girl

like orbs of burning jet. The grandeur of passion invested him with something of dark sublimity.

Faith had let her white, seared face droop under the blaze of his searing eyes, and she faltered out:

"Oh, sir, it never can be that your life and mine shall not be set apart as far as they are now! To bless and benefit a man, a woman must first love and respect him."

"You mean, then, that for you to love and respect me is impossible?"

Under the calm question throbbed a pulse of rising anger that she could not help but feel, but she answered, firmly:

"I could and would respect you profoundly, if, by the force of your own manhood, you forsake your evil life and fulfill your higher destiny; for, I believe, the sinner who repents and reforms is a nobler being than one who never erred. But to *love* you—that is different, and utterly *impossible!*"

"You do not know that. A great love may kindle its own response."

"You deceive yourself. I pray you say no more."

"Do you think I will be silent now, when for the first time in all my wild life I have within my grasp a happiness almost divine? Nay—loving me or hating me, Faith Hilary, you shall be *my* bride, and no other man's!"

The desperate resolve of a conscienceless being vitalized every accent, and, ignorant of all fierce natures as she was, Faith felt that her fate trembled on this man's will.

Nevertheless, she met his terrible eye unflinchingly, as she answered :

“It is as Heaven pleases whether I shall ever love or not, but, rather than give myself unloving, I would die ten thousand times.”

“That is more easily said than done, fair maiden. Death does not always answer to our call, and there are worse fates than that I offer you. Come—reflect. We are as good as alone, you and I, upon this silent world of water and of darkness; give me your hand in solemn pledge that you will be my wife as soon as priest be found to wed us, and from that instant until the one in which we meet to plight the marriage vows, I swear I will not even so much as speak to you, if you wish I should not.”

He held out to her his strong right hand, whose bloody deeds he had been so long recounting to this “lily-maid” he now conjured to link her stainless youth with his dark life of crime.

The girl drew back, and, instead of giving him the pledge he asked, she slipped her cold white fingers within the bosom of her dress, where old Graff Conway’s dagger lay against her loudly beating heart. It flashed upon her now like a revelation that perhaps it was against a nearer pirate than he spoke of that the old man had thus armed her innocence. She said, without a quiver in her voice :

“Sir, it is not the deed of a brave man to place before a helpless girl the alternative between pledging her honor

to the utterance of false vows, or choosing to die ; but you have only to insist upon the demand you have just made, and you will see how quickly I shall decide."

He instantly divined that her words were backed by her consciousness of the ability to defend herself against him, if need be.

It was not in his thought to harm her fair, angelic womanhood other than by wringing from her now the promise which, once made, he felt she would keep at every cost. The soft, exquisite purity of her nature and character had already lifted him above the coarse brutality that could offer, or even meditate, insult to a creature so divinely fair and true.

In uttering the last word, Faith drew forth the keen, delicate blade, that flashed like a moonbeam under the lamp, and held it firmly clasped.

The fear that she might do herself some dangerous injury now so superseded every other idea in Valasco's brain that, under a thoughtless impulse, he laid hold of the hand that held the naked dagger, intending simply to disarm the girl.

Scarce had his fingers closed upon her snowy wrist when a pair of talon-like hands, more like a vulture's claws than fingers of a human creature, gripped round his throat, and bore him to the floor.

For one dread moment there was no sound nor motion after the falling of the captain's ponderous frame ; but, in the dimness and the smoky atmosphere, two forms were

visible to the horror-stricken gaze of the girl—one lying full length, the other, lean and cadaverous, bending over him with still those fatal fingers clenched about their victim's throat.

CHAPTER XXXI.

FAITH'S DELIVERANCE.

A cry of remonstrance from the lips of the girl broke the frightful stillness that followed the captain's fall. It seemed to Faith that those powerful, athletic limbs had lost their capacity to move, far less to struggle, in the clutches of the strange, weird creature that crouched over him.

It was, of course, the Malay. The white cotton tunic or toga that composed his Oriental garb, made the contrast of his skin (which was almost as dark as bronze, and hard and dry as parchment) all the more remarkable.

His long arms, bare to the shoulder, were muscular and supple as if their fibers were of iron wire, and their veins were swollen and cord-like as they strained at their deadly work.

When Faith uttered that exclamation against the deed that too evidently was being committed before her eyes, the Malay seemed to halt for one instant as he turned on

her a look full of amazement. It would not have surprised him more to have heard a lamb plead for mercy toward the wolf whose fang had been wrenched from its throat.

The wonderful, scintillant eyes, keen and vigilant as those of a bird of prey, darted a glance of fierce contempt upon the girl, and then returned to the face on the floor, which now presented an aspect most horrible to behold.

The eyes were starting from their sockets, and a deep purple hue overspread the skin; a faint, gurgling sound was emitted from the open jaws, through which a blackening tongue protruded, and again the deep hush succeeded.

And now a harsh, shrill laugh, like the shriek of the hyena, rang out from the stiff-drawn lips of the Malay, and, flinging aloft his terrible arms, he lifted his face upward, as if adjuring some unseen power, and pronounced one name in a strange language.

It was the name of the woman he had loved and lost through the treachery of the man who now lay lifeless before him.

In the attitude and expression of the Oriental was that wild solemnity of some barbaric priest commending a human sacrifice to a pagan deity.

And such, in fact, was the awful rite that had just been performed; for this dark and wizard-like creature was one of that terrible band of Eastern devotees called "Thugs,"

who constitute themselves a priesthood to the insatiate Goddess of Kali, and who consecrate every act of private revenge to that bloody and mystical religion which they profess. For the irreparable wrong that Valasco had inflicted upon Morad, the Malay, the latter had sworn to be avenged.

For this purpose he had attached himself to the fortunes of the Spaniard, who dreamed not of the unquenchable fire that consumed the heart which Morad hid under his unrevealing features, nor had he any idea that the Malay was concerned in the fate of the unfortunate one whose injuries were thus requited.

With infinite patience had Morad watched his opportunity, not to kill his victim only, for that he might have achieved many times before, but to wreak his purpose at such time, and in such manner, as would most nearly correspond to the wrong he suffered at Valasco's hands—to snatch him from some coveted delight, and in its stead give him death.

It was now accomplished.

But the dreadful close of this tragic scene was not witnessed by the poor, half-frenzied girl, who, at the moment when the Malay resented her entreating cry with such silent but bitter scorn, had fled into her state-room and locked herself in, feeling as if indeed she had been abandoned to the mercy of human fiends.

As the strange, savage cry of the strangler rang through the stillness, Faith fell upon her knees with a piteous ejac-

ulation to Heaven, and buried her face upon her couch, more dead than alive with terror.

She never knew how long she remained thus, convulsed with an agony that no words can picture; but she was roused to something like self-possession by hearing her name called by the fresh, cheery voice of Graff Conway.

"It's me—only me, Graff Conway, your old friend, my dear. We're all right now—open the door, and come out to me."

Scarcely able to move, yet longing for the sight of the kind, re-assuring face of the old mate and her protector, she managed to unfasten the door, and then sank down all white and trembling.

"Come, look up, little one! Where's your courage? It's no time to give way now, my dear, for you'll soon be aboard a first-class steamship. Just come on deck and look at her lights."

"Oh, Mr. Conway!"

"It's as true as I stand here. Come and see—then I'll tell you just how it all happened."

"What has become of the captain?" asked Faith, in a hoarse, frightened way, shrinking up closer to the arm of the mate, on which her cold little hands were tightly clasped as he led her through the cabin.

"Let us not mind about him—he's safe enough, I can tell you."

Faith did not understand, and hoped the mate's reply meant that he had come to the rescue in time to save mis-

chief; but ere she could question further she was borne on deck, and there, in full view, stood the lights and the dimly outlined rigging of a splendid steamer.

She was still some miles away, but the cutter was heading toward her before a gale of wind that took her flying like a gull over the starlit waves.

The Madcap's signals were all out, and Conway assured Faith that all doubt was over of her safe transmission to the steamer within a very short time.

Seeing, from several of her remarks, that she was unconscious of the dark fate of the captain, the old man allowed her to believe that nothing serious had happened.

He had gathered enough from Morad's signs and words of mongrel lingo, to understand that the Malay had interposed to save her from danger. The rest was simple.

Immediately on dispatching the captain, Morad hastened to release the mate, to whom he confided the fact that, contrary to the captain's orders, he had changed the cutter's course in consequence of having overheard the conversation between them; and that, in perpetrating this act of disobedience, he had prepared himself to carry out his purpose at all hazards. He foresaw that before the night ended he would have to kill Valasco, but was not prepared for the circumstances which led to that horrid climax. They suited the Malay's idea of a perfect act of retaliation all the better.

The first pale gleam of dawn was in the sky when the cutter ran alongside the magnificent European steamship

Queen Guinevere. The mate of the Madcap took it upon himself to tell how he had picked up a drowned girl off the Florida coast, and by contrary winds been driven hither and thither, unable to land her.

Of her companion, and every other unfortunate incident connected with her disaster, he kept secretly silent, but so presented her case that she was at once received aboard the ship with the utmost sympathy and cordiality expressed by the numerous passengers.

Before parting with his fair charge, the old sailor advised her to tell no more than he had related in her presence, and to put herself confidently under the care of Captain Desmond, who would feel in duty bound to arrange for her safe return to her friends.

There were tears of deepest gratitude in the bright eyes of the poor little wanderer, as she pressed the horny hand of the old sailor to her lips, and breathed a prayer upon it that Heaven would bless and protect him and his.

Graff Conway bent over the sweet bowed head, and whispered, while the muscles of his hard old face twitched painfully :

“ My dear, Graff Conway's been a wicked old devil in his time, and little deserves the honor of befriending an angel like yourself; but if God spares him yet a little while to make atonement, neither man nor devil shall ever make him do another act that he'd be ashamed for you to see.”

As for Morad, the Malay, he stood apart upon the little

deck of the Madcap, and, when Faith put out her hand to bid him adieu, he stepped back, folded his terrible arms over his breast, shook his head in sign of refusal to let her touch him, and made a salaam before her as slaves do before the sovereigns of the East.

* * * * *

The good ship Queen Guinevere was bound, with a full list of passengers and valuable cargo, for the South American coast, and would touch at Georgetown, in the British dominion of Guiana.

The captain of the steamer commended Miss Hilary with great kindness to the good offices of an English family among his passengers.

Mr. and Mrs. Godfrey, with their two daughters, one of whom was near Faith's age and size, became at once deeply interested in the fortunes of the lone and beautiful young creature whose misfortunes had cast her upon their sympathies, and whose personal attributes of manner and character so soon won for her the affectionate esteem of every one with whom she came in contact.

Miss Godfrey pressed upon Faith the use of her wardrobe, and the two girls soon became as intimate and as devoted as sisters.

Before the steamer reached her port it seemed to Faith that these new friends had made an atmosphere of home about her sad heart.

Nevertheless her thoughts turned anxiously to Lucerne, and she entreated Mr. Godfrey to take the most immediate

opportunity of communicating with her guardian, who would, of course, come or send for her at once.

Meantime she remained a guest in the beautiful home of these English people, who resided upon some salubrious heights overlooking the city of Georgetown.

Mr. Godfrey was a wealthy merchant, who had just returned with his family from a visit to their relatives in England.

After hearing from Faith just how she was placed toward the family at Lucerne, and that her mother was not there, the merchant advised her to remain under his care until she was advised of her guardian's wishes in regard to her return, rather than risk taking the voyage alone, and before she had recovered from the fatigues and anxieties of her recent eventful sojourn on the sea.

Both Mr. Godfrey and his wife discerned in the pale, anxious face of the girl that she had sustained a severe ordeal, from which she must recover before taxing her strength further. For the present we leave her with them.

CHAPTER XXXII.

MISTRESS AND MAID.

A period of several weeks has elapsed since we left Mathew Croft silently combating the singular situation in which he found himself placed—imprisoned on the charge of a felony so dark, and surrounded by people who, in the time of his arrogant prosperity, accepted his civilities and accorded him their own, yet now, in the hour of his calamitous need, left him to a friendless solitude.

Too haughty to press for reasons as to the refusal of the two lawyers who had rejected his case, with the large fee assured for their services, and the still larger one contingent on his safe delivery from the disgraceful position he now occupied, he determined to engage a young attorney of inferior standing at the bar, merely to collect the necessary materials for the preparation of his defense, and to follow the illustrious yet fatal example of the celebrated criminal, Eugene Aram, by acting as his own counsel.

In all of his legal encounters with his brethren of the bar, Mathew Croft had found himself eminently successful in seizing upon and using those unexpected turns in the evidence for which neither side could be wholly prepared ;

and although a stolid and phlegmatic man in other regards, his professional acumen amounted to genius.

There was a still more potent reason for this decision, which was forced upon him by the mortifying withdrawal of the two jurists from his service.

Croft had obstinately conceived the idea that Rachel was not provided with the proper character of evidence to convict him of the alleged crime, after such a lapse of time, during which not a breath of suspicion had touched him.

It was true that her accurate and circumstantial statement of his entire proceedings that related to the poisoning were so startling as to deter him from an open defiance of her power to harm him as long as he could obtain her silence on safer terms.

But he had, from the moment of his arrest, resolved to meet her terrible charges by a flat and absolute denial, and by assuming lunacy for the author of them.

The explanation of his acquiescence in her demands upon him he had already given to Mr. Fields.

Lame as this was, he did not despair of rendering it so plausible that the jury and the public would accept it, provided he could successfully repel her monstrous charges against him.

The time was rapidly approaching for the sitting of the court at which his case would be tried; but as yet Mr. Dale, the young lawyer now enlisted in Croft's cause, had been able to ascertain so little that was of valuable con-

sideration to his client, that the prisoner was forced to rest content with the hope of invalidating such testimony as might appear on the trial.

Not a syllable had yet been heard of the woman who was expected to confront him with the charge of having poisoned her, and, of course, the counsel for the prosecution were inscrutable.

Neither by word nor letter had the ostensible wife of the prisoner attempted to hold any communication with him.

Through Mr. Dale, Croft learned that Leda preserved the severest seclusion, never leaving her own apartments, nor admitting to them a single creature, save the tall negress, who had always attended on her from her childhood, and who had been the confidential servant of Mrs. Morgan from the time of her child's birth, when the devotion, dignity, and faithful reticence of the slave, Roxana, had attached her Northern mistress very warmly to her.

It is a notable fact that, despite the enthusiastic philanthropy felt and professed by the Northern people (and all other anti-slavery communities) for the unhappy condition of the blacks, yet, when brought into any personal relations with these slaves, the advocates of freedom and equality invariably manifested a violent, and sometimes unconquerable, aversion toward their presence or contiguity. It was a matter of the keenest surprise to these humane theorists if they saw a black nurse allowed to

fondle or caress a white child, or if a master or mistress saluted a slave with a cordial grasp of the hand in meeting or parting, after or before a long separation.

These affectionate manifestations were common among the valued and privileged members of the household retinue toward their owners. Mrs. Morgan's strong attachment to Roxana was the more remarkable because of her dislike of having the negro servants about her, and her profound mistrust of them caused her to substitute white servants whenever she came to reside for the winter at Lucerne. Roxana was the only exception to this rule, and she deserved to be; for such was her devotion to the child and the mother, that the slave elected, of her own choice, to leave her family and go with Mrs. Morgan as nurse to the little Leda, no matter for what length of time the separation from her own people lasted. It was not, therefore, surprising that Roxana came to enjoy more of her mistress' confidence than any other person; and it was to this faithful heart that Mrs. Morgan, in dying, commended her daughter with the most solemn admonitions. Her last intelligible words to Roxana were:

“Remember, you will account to me, at the final day, for your love and devotion to my child, who will have, in this wide world, no other disinterested affection but yours.”

When Leda informed Roxana of her intended union with Mathew Croft, the slave had lifted up her voice against it with the solemnity of a Hebrew prophetess.

“But *why*, Roxana—why do you so bitterly denounce this marriage?”

“Honey, I dun’ know, but all I does know is dis—your blessed mar would bury you fus’, ef *she* had any say in dis match.”

“What makes you think that, Roxana?”

“I b’lieve she hated the very earth he trod.”

“Did she tell you so?”

“No. It wasn’t her way to tell much; but I had eyes for to see, an’ I saw dat she fairly shivered when he came nigh her the last time he came to the house arter her sickness.”

“Nonsense. It is you who hate him, because you do not wish to have him as your master. But that need not alarm you. I shall always see that you are not interfered with. Say no more to me against Mr. Croft, for I am determined to marry him.”

This was all that ever occurred between Leda and the slave previous to or after the fatal marriage. Roxana’s devotion continued unabating; and, when the dreadful catastrophe of Croft’s arrest justified her instinctive aversion to him as a husband for Leda, no word of reproach passed the lips of the slave; but it seemed almost to crush her, as if in some way she must bear the odium of the humiliating misfortune when she came to give account of her trust to Leda’s mother “at the final day.” Had Mrs. Morgan designed to secure Roxana’s fidelity by practicing upon the powerful superstition that ruled her

race, she could have fallen upon no device so sure of accomplishing this end as her solemn summons to the negress to meet her at the awful day of doom and reckoning.

One evening, about twilight, Roxana entered her mistress' room, bearing a small silver tray with a cup of tea upon it.

"My chile, you must take this for your headache," said the old woman, placing the tea upon a table at Leda's side.

Mechanically the pale, statuesque woman lifted her face from the nerveless hand on which it leaned, and drank the refreshing beverage without a word.

A strange metamorphosis had taken place in the proud, imperious, queenly mistress of Lucerne. A dumb dejection had fallen upon her haughty spirit, and all the fire in her once passionate face had died out, leaving it cold, and and white, and almost expressionless.

There had been visible waste in the voluptuous curves of her grand form, for her dress, that formerly fitted like wax to her faultless figure, now lay over it loosely, and exposed the ravages that it had suffered during weeks of close confinement and mental torture.

To a vain, proud woman like Leda, the humiliation that had so publicly fallen upon her destiny would alone have been enough to blight and sear her nature; but, added to this, was the devouring anguish of having forever lost the only man who had ever wakened her selfish

heart to a profound sentiment of passion. Had the hope of winning back the devotion of Gordon Warren remained to her—no matter on what unrighteous conditions—she would defiantly and recklessly have ignored the disgrace of her husband's fate, and abandoned herself to the overruling emotions of love. But in the scorn of his look during their last interview she had read the doom of all her hopes in him.

One faint chance remained to keep her heart alive. When Gordon Warren should be sufficiently recovered from his desperate illness to endure an interview, she would make one last appeal to his compassion, and once more charge him with being the author of her calamities by his rejection and desertion of the unselfish love she had laid at his feet, at a time when love could have been the *only* motive to animate her choice. After drinking the tea, Leda said to her faithful attendant :

“Roxana, what news have you for me of Mr. Warren's condition this evening?”

“Well, my chile, he seems to be somethin' better. He's a-sittin' up for the fust time. They is all tryin' to keep from him the news of what's to happen to-morrow.”

Leda shuddered at this allusion to the trial of Mr. Croft, which would open on the following day. She said nothing, and the slave went on :

“Doctor Wise has warned them agin' lettin' him hear a word about that or anything that could excite him in the least, for a shock would about finish him now.”

"Have you seen him?"

"Yes; his face is about like that chalk figger up thar," pointing to a Greek bust in marble that occupied a niche above Leda's writing-desk, "and his eyes blazes like pine torches on a dark night."

"Does he talk?"

"Not a breath—silent as the tomb. I did hear him say a few words to Miss Draper about two hours ago."

"What did he say?"

"They had rolled his chair into the library, nigh the front window, and Miss Draper was on one side of his chair a-helpin' to move it gently along with the doctor. When they stopped it at the open window, his eyes lit on the bird-cage hangin' among the vines on the piazza, with Miss Hil'ry's canary in it. He said:

"'Poor little Faith! I wonder if her bird grieves for her, too?'

"Arter he spoke this, he shut down his eyelids, and two big drops fell down on his face."

"What else?"

Leda's tone was hard and chill.

"Well, nothin'. Miss Draper she went out and left him then, for she got to cryin', too, and I s'pose she was afeard he'd see her at it, and fret worse."

"Is he still in the library?"

"Yes, honey. They wanted him to go back to bed, but he begged 'em to let him be still, and leave him there alone for awhile. Miss Draper and Mrs. Warren's gone

out for a little walk in the lime grove. They axed me to listen for his bell till they gets back."

A sudden light kindled in Leda's languid eyes. She rose quietly, and said:

"Roxana, I will go and speak to him. You keep watch at the front door, and rap lightly at the library when you see the two ladies returning from their walk. I do not care to meet *them*."

CHAPTER XXXIII.

LEDA'S COUP D'ETAT.

Negroes have a native love of intrigue, and more quickly discern an ulterior purpose in any significant duty to which they may be assigned than more intelligent beings.

Easily guessing that her mistress might wish an uninterrupted interview with the young gentleman, whose former devotion to both Mrs. and Miss Morgan was still vivid in Roxana's memory, she took her stand upon the front piazza, just where her tall form and white kerchief could be plainly visible to the two ladies who paced slowly to and fro under the limes, and who, seeing her there within easy reach of the invalid's voice, would doubtless prolong their stroll in the fresh, sweet air of the spring

evening, enjoying such delightful recreation the more because of their long confinement in the sick-room, where for weeks they had relieved each other in the duties of nurse.

Meantime Leda had passed swiftly from her chamber, through the unlighted parlor, into the library. The moon shone brilliantly, and poured a flood of silvery whiteness through the open casements. The sick man sat absorbed in reverie or asleep, she could not tell which, for his eyes were closed and his form motionless.

It frightened Leda to look upon his countenance, white as porcelain and almost as transparent—so etherealized by long illness and the effects of his burning fevers, that he looked more like an embodied spirit than a man, reclining there upon his cushions, with the pale moonbeams shining over him.

The soft trailing of Leda's dress caught his sensitive ear. Without opening his eyes, he said, feebly :

“Is it you, mother?”

“No; it is I—Leda.”

The voice was tremulous and suppliant, and, raising his lids, Warren saw kneeling before him, with her hands folded on her breast, and her beautiful pale face sadly drooping, Leda, in the full blaze of the moonlight.

He did not speak nor stir for a little while. The change in her was almost as startling to him as she had found it in himself. The almost dazzling splendor of her royal beauty had given place to a delicate, chastened, and, in her, pa-

thetic loveliness—still regal and incomparable, but rather that of a dethroned and suffering queen than the proud, insolent, invincible Circe that he had found her at the first.

Her whole person, as well as her attitude, seemed to offer a prayer for his forbearance and pity. However she may have sinned, there could be no question as to her having suffered fierce agonies. Every line of her face and form showed this. To see her kneeling there so humbly, and remember how lately she had reigned queen of the world that ever bows its neck to wealth and beauty, was a thing to touch a brave, manly soul like Gordon Warren's.

He said, very gently, but firmly :

“Rise, I pray you, madam. I am not able to move, else I had long since raised you from so unbecoming a posture.”

“No ; I must and will kneel to you until you have heard and granted, or else denied my prayer.”

She had raised her eyes to him now, and they were filled with unshed tears, that gave to her face an indescribable expression of woe ; then she hurried her words in a low, piteous way, and unfolded to him very briefly, but pointedly, all that had transpired, from the moment of Rachel's appearance at Lucerne, a week after her marriage, until the present moment. She artfully made herself the martyred one in the dark romance, reminding Warren that it was his desertion that had driven her to accept Croft's offer of marriage, with all the dreadful consequences that now overwhelmed her.

At the end she said, lifting her clasped hands entreatingly :

“To-morrow his infamy and my humiliation will be proclaimed in open court before the world. Guilty or not of the crime alleged against him, the fact of his former marriage and the existence of his former wife remains. What, then, am I better than an outcast, and an object of scorn and contemptuous pity for all the world? Oh, Gordon! Gordon! remember that you promised my dead mother to befriend her lonely child; remember that it was your abandonment that sent me to this fate, and save, oh! save me, at least, from meeting my disgrace alone—uncared for, unsustained! I was not only willing to unite my destiny with yours when I still believed myself rich and honored, but I longed to prove my love for you by embracing your poverty and obscure station. Shall I now, in my hour of dire need, pray for your protection in vain?”

“God knows you shall not, so far as it lies in my power to shelter you,” said Warren, leaning forward, and reaching to her one of his thin, weak hands, that shook like an old man’s from sheer feebleness.

His voice was husky with emotion.

Leda seized the emaciated hand, carried it passionately to her lips, then pressed it to her heart, sobbing out words of gratitude, and mingling them with epithets of frantic devotion.

It was some moments before Warren was able to detach

his weak fingers from the eager clasp of Leda's hands, and induce her to rise from her abject posture beside him.

Although he by no means divined the construction which she intended ultimately to place upon his acts and words, he dimly foresaw that he would be sorely tried before all was done.

He was at present too enfeebled in brain and body to attempt to cope with the situation further than to quiet Leda's agitation, and, if possible, release himself from the discussion of her affairs until he should have time to reflect upon the unnatural and most distressing complication which she had just revealed to him.

Already his head throbbed with a painful sense of oppression, and his nerves became tremulous, a faintness overcame him, and he said :

"Give me a draught of the tonic, please," pointing to where a decanter and glass stood upon the table.

She poured out a potion of the medicated wine, which he drank, and then said to her, simply :

"You must pardon me if I beg that you will leave me to myself for the present. If I am to help you, I must collect my ideas, and, to do this, I must be utterly at rest."

She once more leaned down and touched his hand with her lips, then silently left him.

She had availed herself of his physical weakness to wring from it what she deemed a valuable concession, and she feared to trespass further on his debility.

A little later, when his mother and Miss Draper came in from their walk, they found him asleep, and apparently much exhausted.

A cold dew had gathered on his brow, and his respiration seemed troubled. Sleep was the best restorative possible, and they left him to waken of himself.

As Miss Draper passed from the library into the hall, she saw that a stranger, a gentleman, stood at the door upon the piazza. She immediately went forward.

The gentleman uncovered as he bowed to her, and she saw that he was a man of venerable and dignified appearance.

"Good-morning, sir. Will you walk in?" she asked, seeing that he still stood beyond the threshold.

"First oblige me, miss, by ascertaining if Mrs. Croft will be pleased to receive Mr. Elmore Craig."

CHAPTER XXXIV.

ARRAIGNED.

Prepared as the community had been by the newspaper publications, and common gossip, for the impending trial of the well-known attorney, Mathew Croft, on the charge of attempted murder of his wife by poison, it was not

strange that great excitement prevailed among the citizens of —— when the day appointed for the case arrived.

We shall enter the court-room at the moment when Mr. Tremont, the solicitor for the State, opens the indictment.

The jury has been duly impaneled and charged with the prisoner, who has pleaded “not guilty.”

There they sit confronting each other—the twelve who represent the country to whom the accused appeals for justice, and the man whom these are solemnly sworn to declare a verdict upon *according to the evidence*.

Twelve calm, strong, earnest, resolute faces, that do not look as if they could be easily moved by impulse or any unimportant causes, are all turned full upon the prisoner, who sits at ease within the dock, and glances deliberately over his judges as if taking the measure of each man’s mental and moral caliber.

Mathew Croft’s large, composed face gives out no sign of inward trepidation. It is true that anxiety and imprisonment have somewhat worn and whitened it, but so wonderfully controlled are its lineaments that no one present suspects that any effort has been necessary to bring to those stolid features that look of supreme assurance of safety.

With the alert interest of a mere looker-on, he turns himself from the jurors to fix a steadfast regard upon the counsel for the State, who thus addresses the court and jury;

* “May it please the court and gentlemen of the jury, it is my painful duty to arraign before you to-day a man whom this community have honored and trusted. The crime imputed to the prisoner at the bar is that of a willful attempt to murder the wife of his bosom, by means the most detested and abhorred of any that blackens the catalogue of crimes.

“Such an accusation naturally excites the indignation of honest minds against the criminal. I shall not endeavor to increase this feeling which it is your duty to resist, for the nature of our present inquiry calls for your sober and dispassionate attention.

“The offense with which the prisoner is charged is one easy of perpetration, but difficult of detection. The murderer by poison is not pointed out to justice by the bloody marks of his guilt, nor the fatal instrument of his crime; his horrid purpose is planned in secret, and may even be executed without his presence; his guilt can only be traced by circumstances; but circumstances do, and in this case will, I think, as plainly reveal the guilty purpose as if a hundred witnesses testified to the actual commission of the crime.

“It is my duty to state to you those circumstances, and to add to them such observations as the nature of the case fairly affords.

*The author is largely indebted for her information, and some of her expressions in the above, to the legal report of a certain celebrated English trial.

“These observations will be subject to the correction of a discerning judge, who will permit nothing to be placed in the scales of justice but what ought to be weighed there.

“Gentlemen, the prisoner, Mr. Mathew Croft, is accused of having verified the fable of the wolf who clothed himself in the spotless fleece of a sheep, and, entering a peaceful fold thus disguised, carried off, to be destroyed, one of its lambs.

“In brief, Mr. Mathew Croft, in the guise of a holy preacher of the gospel of truth and righteousness, did take unto himself from the simple and honest congregation to whom he preached at Bethel, the young woman, Rachel Logan, the orphan ward of one of the elders of that church.

“This young, trustful creature, together with her fortune of \$60,000, in her own right, were by the prisoner duly and lawfully appropriated. Almost immediately thereafter Mr. Croft removes with his wife from her home and her friends, and, on the pretext of ill-health, goes to reside in a distant State in one of the Gulf cities.

“Soon after his arrival in the new locality—where he still professes, but does not follow, his priestly calling—his wife, Rachel, falls into a feeble state of health, for which her physicians can discern no reasonable cause in a woman of her robust and perfect organism. So alarming do her symptoms become, that their diagnosis finally points to softening of the brain, accompanied by a letting

down of the nervous tone, which reduces the patient to the pitiable condition of a bed-ridden invalid. During all this, Mr. Croft's conduct toward his suffering wife is marked by a tender solicitude worthy of the most devoted husband.

“From his hand the poor sick wife craves and receives the nourishment and prescriptions ordered for her relief, and, finally, as the close of the sad drama approaches, it is he who watches *alone* beside her pillow through the still hours of the night. Only one human creature—whose testimony cannot under the laws be admitted into this court—divines a treacherous intent beneath all this outward devotion.

“Amy, the slave and nurse, suspects, from certain conditions in which she finds her mistress after the vigils kept by her master alone, that over-doses of the narcotic must have been administered to cause the deep languor and prostration that succeed Mr. Croft's attendance at her nocturnal slumbers. Imbued with this idea, the slave determines to watch unseen in the antechamber, which is in darkness, what quantity of the night-draught is administered to her mistress.

“Amy hears the hour appointed for the dose strike from the clock upon Mrs. Croft's mantel, and, immediately after, hears her master propose the night-draught, hears Mrs. Croft's affectionate assent to it, and watches while it is prepared in a screened nook formed by the tall bed-head disposed against an angle of the wall.

“Here Mr. Croft is safe from observation either from any person in or out of the chamber, unless one who approached so near that he must be aware of the presence.

“But Mr. Croft has not counted upon the distinct reflection which the bureau mirror makes of the whole scene in the angle to one standing at a certain point within the antechamber.

“Not chance, nor the calculations of an ignorant slave, but that mysterious Nemesis that tracks the criminal, places the old servant, Amy, just where this reflection meets and arrests her astonished sight. She sees her master empty a *smaller* potion than the one prescribed for the night-draught into the apothecary’s glass used for the purpose of measuring the dose accurately. This glass he holds up to the light after pouring the medicine into it, and then Amy is struck by a wonderful transfiguration of her master’s subdued and grief-stricken countenance into an expression of fiendish enjoyment of some idea which Amy’s subtle fancy connects with the physic he is about to administer to her mistress. This conclusion is presently justified, when the slave sees her master, Mr. Croft, take from the inner pocket of his vest a small package, which he unwraps.

“From a quantity of dark tissue paper Amy sees him take a little crystal flask, and then unstop and empty its contents into the glass with her mistress’ medicine.

“At this moment the slave hears Mrs. Croft ask her husband :

“‘What is burning?’

“Amy testifies that a faint odor as of burning cloth exhales from the vial that Mr. Croft empties.

“She hears him answer that the smell arises from a piece of linen that has fallen into the lamp; but Amy plainly sees in the reflection from the looking-glass that no linen has been near the lamp. With a sense of some dreadful injustice to her helpless mistress underlying all this, the slave, impotent to interfere, except at a cost which she has not the courage to incur, sees the fatal dose administered, and hears the devoted woman utter her loving gratitude to the man who thus ministers to her sufferings.

“The slave then beholds her master carefully rinse the glass and the crystal flask with a sponge that he uses in the basin of water, and afterward squeezes and returns to its place on the towel-rack.

“The flask he carefully re-wraps in the foldings of tissue-paper, and begins to replace it in his pocket, when a sudden aversion to carrying it on his person seems to seize him, and he looks about for a suitable place to hide or destroy the empty flask. At last he espies, among the long-accumulated layers of dust that overhang the tester of the tall canopy of the bed, what he conceives to be a convenient receptacle for the tiny package. The housemaids have respected that tester so long that it is not likely they will very soon again interfere with its time-honored dust; and into the midst of it he tosses the package.

“Hours later, the family, with whom Mr. and Mrs. Croft are boarders, are awakened with the announcement of Mrs. Croft’s death. It is only a little more sudden than they had any reason to expect, and no one seems surprised. The inquest pronounces on the body its verdict that the deceased had come to her death from bodily derangements duly attested by her attending physician. By the urgent request of the landlady, the body is removed to the chapel at the cemetery, the time being midsummer, and the locality liable to infectious diseases, that a corpse lying under a tin roof on an August day might generate. At a late hour of the ensuing evening the obsequies of the deceased are performed, and within twenty-four hours after the bereaved husband had quitted the city forever, leaving his rooms and effects in charge of the landlady, with directions to have his things cared for until she received his instructions concerning them. These, gentlemen, are the facts as they appear on the face of the evidence. It remains for them, and their underlying horrors, to be developed before your eyes by the testimony that has been accumulated, and will be evolved for your consideration. Justice demands that you sift this man’s intentions thereby. We shall, with the permission of the court, proceed to array the witnesses in due course and form.”

The counsel for the prosecution was silent for a few moments, and all eyes examined the face of the prisoner. It was calm and intrepid as ever, but under the bristling

eyebrows a ray, intent and burning, shot toward the witness-stand, upon which appeared a woman, whose countenance was utterly unknown to the prisoner. In answer to the question put by Mr. Craig, who examined the evidence for the State, the woman made these statements :

“My name is Eliza Lock. I am the youngest daughter of Harriet Rowe, of Galveston. I do remember the prisoner, who, with his wife, Rachel Croft, boarded, during the summer of 18—, with my mother. Yes, he is much changed as to the color of his hair and beard, which were black when I knew him, otherwise I find little alteration. I would know him anywhere. His face isn't easily forgotten. I was seventeen years old when he lived in my mother's house. He was devoted to his wife, and she worshiped the ground he walked on. She was well when she came. She got into poor health pretty soon after. She took to her bed in about six weeks, and staid there. She liked to have him always with her. At first the old nurse, Amy, slept in her room, and gave the medicine. About three or four days before she died Mr. Croft took to sitting up all night with her. I did not know anything about Amy's going back to the chamber after she was dismissed for the night ; but my room opened on the back staircase, and about midnight I heard crying outside of my door. I got up and looked out. Amy was seated on the stairs, with her apron over her head, crying. I said, ‘What ails you? Is Mrs. Croft worse?’ She said, ‘I don't know ; I am scared about her.’ I said, ‘Go to bed ;

you can't mend matters by sitting there all night.' I went back to bed and to sleep, and, before day, heard that Mrs. Croft was dead. No, there was nothing strange in Mr. Croft's manner; he was very sad indeed. The old woman, Amy, went on like mad. Yes, Mr. Croft did kindly consent to have the body taken from the house early next day. Amy would not go with it. My mother, and sister, and myself went to the cemetery in the carriage with Mr. Croft behind the hearse. He looked very sad all the way. I went up to Mrs. Croft's room about midday. It was all in order except a pile of dust scattered behind the bed. It looked like the dust that collects in places that are never swept. Yes, I think it must have fallen from the tester. There was a quantity of it. I did not touch anything. I did not notice what was on the table or washstand. Mother found a heap of broken glass under Mrs. Croft's bedroom window. It looked like the apothecary's glass measure. It had figures and lines on the broken pieces. I did not smell it; no one did that I know of. Mr. Croft left the house that night and staid at the hotel. He came back for a little while next morning. I heard him scolding Amy for burning up one of his books with the trash. She said it was old and ragged, and, finding it on the floor, she burnt it up with the litter of papers he used to scatter under his writing-table. Yes, I think I would know the book again. I saw it several times lying open on his table. It was in a strange language. Yes, that is the same book, or one exactly like it. The one I

saw had only part of a back on it just as that has. It looks the same anyway. No, Mr. Croft never came back to us. He wrote mother where to send his things. She sent them all. We never heard of Amy afterward. Yes, I saw Mrs. Croft buried. No, the coffin was not opened in the cemetery, nor at the grave. I did see the body after it was in the coffin before it left the house. It looked natural. It looked like some one asleep. It was cold and stiff. Yes, my mother and sister are both dead. That is all I know."

Miss Lock was then dismissed, and another stranger, a man, placed on the stand. His evidence was as follows :

"My name is Ormond Louis Cathcart. I am a Catholic priest."

At this there was a general stir in the court-room. All eyes bent forward eagerly to scan the spare, tall figure of a man past middle age, with a clear, bold eye, a quiet, patient face, and the look of a man who feared nothing human. The prisoner shifted his posture just a little, and, if possible, appeared less concerned than before. His upper lip seemed to curve a little scornfully as he cast his eye around the awakened audience, who looked at the priest as if he were a supernatural agent in the drama.

CHAPTER XXXV.**FATHER LOUIS' STORY.**

A long black coat (that fitted loosely over a black vest buttoned close up to the throat, where a narrow band of white linen showed) and black trousers gave something of severity to the aspect of the priest, Ormond Cathcart. His large head sat well upon his long, muscular neck and solid shoulders. Hair of a light brown, sprinkled with gray, was brushed back from a wide, open forehead, and hung rather low over the collar of his coat in two curls that seemed to arrange themselves naturally. The clean-shaven face was strongly molded, but gentle; there was great power of will and concentration in the countenance. His eyes were deep-set and thoughtful; they seemed to look inward more than outward. He had all the appearance of a student and a gentleman.

Mr. Craig had put the question as to his name and profession, and now added :

“Mr. Ormond Louis Cathcart, will you proceed to make a plain and uninterrogated statement of your testimony before the jury?”

The priest turned himself promptly till he faced the jury squarely. He spoke as follows :

“I have been a resident of Galveston over twenty-five

years; I have charge of a small church, composed mostly of Germans; I am called by the Catholics, and most of the Protestants, Father Louis. About nine months ago I was occupied as usual very late at night in my library, which is also my laboratory, in which I recreate myself with scientific experiments when not too much pressed with my parochial duties. It must have been close on to midnight when I heard a rap at the door of my house. Expecting that it might be a sick call, I went to the door, and found there a perfect stranger, who said:

“‘Father Louis, I have come to you on a matter of great importance—can I speak to you alone for an hour?’”

“I bade him enter the library, and, while I finished an operation over a spirit lamp, asked him to state his business. He said he would wait for my undivided attention. I was struck by the dignity of his voice and manner in making this reply, and at once put out the lamp and left my apparatus. I had paid little attention to his appearance at first; I now noticed that he was a man of uncommon height, and great majesty of countenance. I saw at once that he was an Indian. He gave me a brief outline of his history, from the time he commenced life as the apprentice in a drug store to that moment, when he enjoyed quite a reputation for medical skill as a quack doctor. I knew of him by reputation. He was called simply ‘Uriel.’ Some prefixed the title of doctor to this quaint name, but he was generally mentioned as ‘Uriel, the Indian.’ He was much esteemed for his benevolence, as

well as for his art. I felt glad to know him personally, and at once dismissed my preoccupation, giving him the closest attention. He held a sealed packet in his hands. He began to speak in a slow, mellow, and impressive voice, using good but very simple and forcible English. As well as I can recall them, and they are not easily forgotten, his words were :

“ ‘Father, I think I am going to die very soon. I have a disease of the heart, and my symptoms have of late admonished me to “set my house in order.” I see your eye light, but I have not come to you for confession, nor any of the sacred rites it is your office to dispense ; not that I despise your religion—on the contrary, it is the best form of doctrine that I know of at all, and does more good in the world than any other ; but I have my own ideas about this and the future life, and I need no one to stand between me and my Maker. This will not alter your interest in what I am about to say. For almost seventeen years I have been the custodian of a strange and solemn secret, and a heavy trust. I feel that God will call me from my place before the issue comes in which my testimony will be needed for the protection of the innocent and the punishment of a great crime. That issue is *sure* to come ; I must leave a record of what will stand in my stead when justice claims her due.’ ”

“ He then opened the sealed package, and took from it the curious old volume which lies there before Mr. Craig,

and a closely written MS. The MS. he read slowly and carefully aloud to me. After which he said :

“ ‘This is substantially and circumstantially all that I know concerning the horrid outrage perpetrated by the man herein named, Mathew Croft, upon the woman herein named, Rachel Croft. Every word of this deposition has been written by my own hand, and to the truth of every word contained in this writing I swear, here on my knees before Almighty God, and I call you, the priest of the church, to witness my oath.’

“ Thus speaking, he had gone down before me upon his knees, and, with his right hand and his majestic face upraised toward heaven, he said :

“ ‘May God, my Creator and Judge, deal with me according to the truth or the falsity of what I have set down on this paper, to be hereafter used for the protection of the innocent and the punishment of the guilty. And this I swear to, knowing that the moment is near at hand when I shall be called to my own account of deeds done in the body.’

“ After this solemn oath he returned to his seat, and, placing both the book and the MS. in my hands, said :

“ ‘To you I confide these until such time as Rachel Croft, or her child, who is called, for the reasons herein given, Faith Hilary, shall demand them of you to be produced as evidence against the man Mathew Croft, at whose hands she will one day demand restitution of her property for the sake of her child, and upon whose

guilt toward herself she will invoke the punishment of the law. Until such time I rely upon your honor as a gentleman to respect my confidence, and the will of the unhappy woman who has decreed my silence for all these years. Should you find yourself near death before the arrival of that period, you will, as I have done, confide in trust, to another as worthy of your confidence as you are of mine, all that is now committed to your charge, with any further testimony that Providence may cast in your way.'

"Little more passed between us—nothing more relating to this case. The old Indian left my house, and the next day, when I went into his neighborhood for the purpose of making some inquiries about his life and character, I heard that he was dead. I called at the house, and was received by the woman Rachel, who was called by the name of Uriel's reputed niece. She reported that her daughter had discovered the old man sitting at the table in his bedroom, with his lamp still burning, and an uncompleted letter open before him. A few days after this I learned that the woman had left her daughter in the charge of the old negro nurse, Amy, and gone away. Subsequently the girl and her nurse were, as I learned, by Rachel's orders removed to this place in care of Mathew Croft, the prisoner at the bar. Assuring myself of this fact, I believed it my duty to await quietly the course of events. About one month ago I received this letter from Rachel Croft."

Father Louis then produced and read aloud the following :

“REVEREND SIR :—You will remember that I told you of an unfinished letter found under the hand of my dead friend and the saviour of my life, Uriel, the Indian. The contents of that letter informed me that if I should ever have the desire to use the materials he had so carefully collected against one Mathew Croft, I would find them in your possession, or that of some one to whom you would consign them at your death. These materials I now demand of you, and also that you shall appear to attest the validity of them in open court when summoned. Your obliged servant,

“RACHEL CROFT.”

Father Louis went on to say :

“This letter was delivered into my hands by a gentleman now present in this house, and upon the summons of the court I am here to testify.”

Mr. Craig then rose to his feet in front of the witness-stand, and said :

“Have you anything further to relate in connection with the trust confided to you by the Indian?”

“Yes; I deemed it my duty and my privilege, after carefully examining the written testimony given into my hands by the Indian, to make certain investigations which would enlighten me with regard to the agency which the singular old volume filled in the dark tragedy which, according to the Indian's representation, had been enacted. Fortunately, my own scholarship was sufficiently extensive to enable me to do this without the aid of a third party.”

Father Louis here reached out his hand, and Mr. Craig placed in it the aged and discolored remains of a once

large volume. Only a portion of it had survived the ravages of time and students. Father Louis went on :

“ This volume is a curious disquisition in Persian upon certain arts known and practiced in the East by Hakims and Magians. A strange enough blending of science and superstition, which under the more potent alchemy of the learned science of our time easily dissolves, and the tiny particles of truth appear concrete and whole amid the dead ashes of the old superstitions. Among other fables and stories related in these pages, is one that appears near the last portion of the leaves that remain together. It tells of a young man who, under the arts of a certain El Hakim of Ispahan, was put to death by means of a drug distilled from strange desert plants. But in order that he might not bear the stings which his conscience would inflict for selling poison for murderous purposes, the Hakim delivered to the murderer a liquid, which he was instructed to administer only after having by other medicaments reduced the victim to so low a state of health that the drug would produce a condition of atrophy so profound and prolonged as to have all the appearance of death, but in reality admit of the patient's resuscitation. The narrative states that only upon a body already much depleted and weakened will such an effect be produced. A high state of vitality would inevitably resist the power of the drug so as to render its action only partial ; but when *complete*, no traces of poison could be ever after discovered in the body *if death ensued*.

“Note the phrase—*if death ensued*. The tale goes on to state that the prescription was followed, and to all appearances the man *died* and was *buried*. The Hakim got his fee for the deed, and subsequently offered the friends of the deceased to bring him to life by a miracle, in consideration of a certain large sum of money if he should succeed. This offer was taken—the dead was raised. Here the narrative is broken off, for the concluding pages of the volume are missing, and have been missing for ages, if one may judge by the appearance of the stubs of leaves left still in the old, disfigured binding.”

Here Father Louis paused, and, lifting his large, calm, sad eyes from the volume, cast them slowly round upon the spectators, and, lastly, let them rest upon the stony face of the prisoner. He then added, solemnly :

“The unavoidable inference is that the man who employed the use of this drug, according to the instructions obtained from this volume, *knew that his victim would be buried alive*.”

A shudder seemed simultaneously to shake every man in the court-room. The prisoner alone showed no sign of disturbance at this hideous suggestion.

After the silence that followed his last words, Father Louis continued :

“But the narrative herein related gives only a partial description of the strange and terrible properties and powers of this wonderful essence. Possibly had the reader

of these pages pursued his scientific researches as far as I was led to do from the hints thus derived, the ordeal of this day would not have been inflicted upon a civilized community."

Here Father Louis returned the old book to Mr. Craig, and was provided with another smaller and less antiquated one, from which he read aloud as follows :

"Although it is quite true that this drug (alluding to the essential oil of the desert plants mentioned in the Persian volume) does in some cases, and under certain conditions of the body, produce a syncope or trance undistinguishable from death, it is *not* without its *revealing* properties even when the patient has been restored to life and comparative health. For those who die under its effects, a blackened and distorted carcass attests almost instantly the instrumentality and *nature* of the poison used. In those who recover, the traces of its dread passage through the blood remain in the whitened hair, from which the coloring matter has been utterly subtracted never to be restored ; in the shrunken and parchment-like skin, to which neither time nor treatment will give back the hue of health, and the enfeebled organism that performs its functions laboriously and painfully to the end of its existence, which may or may not be a long one ; and, lastly, in a certain singular and almost indescribable brilliancy in the eyes, perhaps intensified by the absence of color in the lashes and brows, which, like the hair, are left of a dead white shade. This brilliancy as-

sumes the pale luster that flame makes over alcohol that is set on fire."

The priest closed the book, and remained upon the witness-stand.

The MS. of Uriel, the Indian, was then read aloud to the court by Mr. Craig. It contained, in a condensed form, all the items and circumstances already narrated in the chapters concerning the marriage, supposed death, resurrection, and subsequent history of Rachel Croft, including various details of her life, and that of the girl, Faith Hilary.

CHAPTER XXXVI.

FATHER LOUIS' EXPERIMENT.

Mr. Craig then said to the witness :

"Did you make any discoveries concerning the remarkable drug mentioned in the old Persian volume, and also in the medical text-book from which you read an extract?"

"I did. I was at considerable pains to procure a small quantity of the Arabian oil alluded to, for it is not to be found in the shops of ordinary pharmacists. I obtained it from the laboratory of a certain medical college in the city of New Orleans. It was sold to me at a high price,

and only after I had produced proofs of my sacred profession and my scientific experiments, which had been duly reported in certain journals of medical art."

"What were the uses to which you applied the drug?"

"I prepared a portion of it in a diluted form, and experimented with it upon a delicate greyhound, whose life was of great value to me, yet which I was willing to sacrifice in order to test the qualities of the drug, and add something to the cause of science and humanity."

"What were the results of your experiment?"

"First allow me to state that the animal in question seemed in all respects a subject of rare fitness for such a purpose. Its extremely sensitive organism and delicate structure, together with its rearing and habits, made it approach as nearly as possible to the human species in point of physical sensibility. Its food, drink, and lodgings had been the same as my own, almost from its birth, and its sagacity was something that bordered on intellectuality.

"It was not without a wrenching of the heart, believe me, that I determined on devoting this, the sole companion of lonely life and arduous labors, to what I conceived to be my duty to humanity."

Here Father Louis paused a moment; his face had grown paler, and his lip was not so quiet and firm as it had been; but, in a few seconds, he went on:

"I proceeded to reduce the already delicate physical condition of my hound, by the use of depleting medicines,

until she grew too weak to move from her rug at my fireside—until I could no longer bear the dumb, imploring gaze of her beautiful golden eyes.

“One morning I gave her to drink, in a small portion of milk, the solution I had prepared. I sat by, and kept my fingers on the large artery in the throat of the hound, counting its pulsations. In less than ten minutes, the dog, whose head rested on my knee, was fast asleep. Slower and feebler beat the blood through the artery, and finally the aortic flow entirely ceased. Numbness in all the frame was succeeded by chillness, and afterward by a gradual stiffening of the limbs. All this took place without a struggle or a moan. I believed that hound was dead; but, as the time went by, and no distention of the face or body, nor blackening of the skin ensued, I began to hope for the best.

“The hound lay in that condition of coma for twenty-four hours. I had, immediately after the swoon, removed her to a room without fire and filled with fresh air. At intervals during that time I applied strong sal-volatile and other restorative means. About the last of the twenty-four hours I was awakened from my sleep upon a couch near the table, where the body of the hound reposed upon a mattress, by a low whine, almost like the sick moan of a little child. I felt a thrill of joy, and went at once to the table. Poor Sappho's eyes were open, and her tongue hung pantingly from her parched jaws. I poured a little new milk down her throat, and this I repeated at intervals

of ten minutes, all the while chafing her with my hands. I had already removed her to the fire. As the sunlight fell over her, I observed a queer, dull look about the long, silky hair on her hide, that had been noted for its glossy blackness and beauty, and also that there was a filmy whiteness over her brilliant eyes.

“In three days more the once jet-black hound was white as snow—not a shade of color left on a spot of her hide; and the dark golden hue of her eyes wore the strangest aspect imaginable—they looked like globes of yellow glass, with fire behind them. In less than a week after that, the hound died in a fit.”

There was silence for a time. Every one present seemed to sympathize with the feelings of the calm, pale priest, who had performed no mean act of heroism in offering his dumb friend and companion on the altar of science. Mr. Craig then said:

“Did you observe the odor of the oil?”

“I did; there is no mistaking it, and one of its strongest properties is its insidiousness. It seems to permeate metal and glass so, that in a century its odor will still be distinct, no matter what cleansing process may have been applied to the vessel that contained it for even a few moments.”

In saying this, Father Louis took from his pocket a little dark wooden casket. He opened it with a pressure of his finger, and then took out of it a small glass vial, with a glass stopple bound down with kid.

As soon as the kid was removed, a faint, sickening aroma reached the olfactories of the nearest bystanders. When the stopple was lifted, the whole court-room was redolent of an odor like burning cotton.

Father Louis refitted the stopple, tied up and replaced the vial in its casket. He then caused a light spray from an atomizer that he had at hand to ascend into the air. It was a simple solution of scented ammonia, which, with the strong current of fresh air passing through the house, soon destroyed the subtle odor of the oil, and left the atmosphere sweet and pure, with perhaps the faintest tinge of the fragrant evaporation from the atomizer.

Mr. Craig then produced from a parcel upon the table before him a singularly-shaped crystal flask, from which he had unwrapped some dark tissue paper, and a small piece of surgeon's sponge, also well wrapped in oil silk.

These he handed to the witness, saying :

"Would you be able to swear to any peculiar odor about these articles?"

Father Louis held the sponge, then the vial, to his nostrils. Before he made any attempt to answer Mr. Craig's question, the judge said :

"Mr. Cathcart, have you ever seen those articles before?"

"No ; never till this moment," replied the priest, promptly.

"You will now answer Mr. Craig's question."

"There is no sort of hesitation in my mind about the

odor of these articles. It is precisely the same, though fainter, as that just a little while ago exhaled from the essential oil I exhibited to the court."

The judge ordered the articles passed to the jury, and desired their opinion as to the odor they emitted. One of the jurymen, whom the smell of the oil had very sensibly nauseated, said, as he held the flask to his nose :

"Pah! I should know that smell if I perceived it in the middle of a wilderness a thousand years hence. It is the same as the oil."

All the twelve jurors, in language less emphatic, concurred in pronouncing it the same as the oil.

Mr. Craig resumed possession of the flask and sponge, and took his seat, in signal that he was through with the witness, who was still upon the stand, looking weary with his long examination. The judge said :

"Does the counsel for the defense desire to interrogate the witness?"

Mr. Dale looked up at his client, the prisoner. Mr. Croft, without changing his indolent posture, leaning back in his chair, with one hand supporting his head, shook his head negatively at Mr. Dale, who declined to put any question to the witness.

Father Louis then retired from the stand.

His place was immediately taken by an old man with a white beard that flowed down over his chest, and white hair that curled around his forehead, and his face was dark as a Moor's.

He spoke very broken English. He testified that he was a chemist in the city of Puebla; that, a few weeks prior to the dates named as the period of Mr. Croft's settlement in Galveston, he was standing one day at the counter of a large drug store in New Orleans, where he happened to be at the time on business; that he saw a man come in, and heard him ask the druggist for a certain oil, which he knew to be an imported drug that was never manufactured in this country; that the man supplemented his demand by stating, before the druggist replied, that he wanted it for the purpose of making some curious experiment in chemistry, of which he said he was professor in one of the Western cities. The druggist did not have the drug, and the Mexican told the stranger that he could easily procure it in Puebla. The stranger ordered a small quantity, which he said he would pay any price for when delivered. He named a certain importing firm in Galveston as the place at which the package was to be deposited, simply addressed "M. C.," and not labeled as to its contents.

The Mexican stated that, by the hands of a trading sea captain, he had sent the package according to directions, and been promptly paid by the merchant to whom it was delivered.

He had never heard anything more of the stranger, the professor of chemistry, but had recognized Mathew Croft to be the same man who ordered the oil from him the moment he set eyes on the prisoner.

This testimony was verified by a clerk belonging to the importing firm through which the package from the Pueblan chemist had been duly conveyed to the prisoner at the bar, whom the clerk declared to be the man, Mathew Croft, who claimed the package marked "M. C.," for which he had previously deposited a sum of money, to be paid whenever such a package should be delivered. The clerk furthermore asserted that Mr. Croft had several times called to inquire after the expected package.

The Mexican was asked if he could identify the vessel that contained the oil shipped to "M. C." in Galveston. He said he could easily do so, as it was a crystal flask of curious shape, with the figure of a rose blown into the glass on one side. It had formerly contained oil of roses. The flask which Mr. Craig had in his hand exactly answered the description given by the chemist.

This witness was dismissed after a negative sign from Mr. Dale declining to catechise him.

An anxious silence now fell upon the audience. The fatal testimony seemed to be closing slowly and surely about the accused. He alone showed no sign of trouble or apprehension. His face was calm as a mask, his attitude rather languid. He seemed to behold the scene with a supreme indifference. This affected the jurors variously. To some it was an indication of hardened villainy; to others, of a consummate art in feigning; and to a few, of conscious innocence.

The attention of the court was now arrested by the

appearance of a creature that seemed to be the galvanized corpse of a woman, who glided noiselessly and phantom-like, in long, black garments, to the witness-stand.

A chill of vague and painful horror crept to the very marrow of the assemblage.

They shuddered as though they looked on one newly risen from the dead.

CHAPTER XXXVII.

RACHEL'S TESTIMONY.

From the corpse-like face of the mute witness not an eye could stir; a horrid fascination held the gaze suspended on that seemingly inanimate visage that bore a resemblance to a statue, in terra cotta, with hair, eyebrows and lashes of a dead whiteness, and from whose rigid sockets a pair of blazing black orbs shone, and glittered, and pierced with a terrible brightness. This miraculous face might have scared the wits from a strong man coming unawares upon his sight. It sat motionless upon a motionless body that was draped from the throat in a long, black, circular cloak. Nothing of the shape was visible; the hands were folded under the cloak.

As this woman appeared, the face of the prisoner under-

went a change which no one saw, because all looks were centered upon the woman.

A flash of some internal terror came out upon his stolid face, as when lightning leaps out from a dull, black cloud; but quickly as the electric vein it retreated to its hiding-place, and, when the audience once more examined his countenance, it was as unrevealing and self-possessed as before. The awful woman there before him on the witness-stand seemed to be no concern of his.

"What is your name?" asked Mr. Craig of the mummy-like woman.

"Rachel Croft *nee* Logan."

"Rachel Croft, is the prisoner at the bar known to you?"

"Mathew Croft, the prisoner at the bar, is my husband, and the father of my child."

These responses fell automatically from the hueless lips that scarcely seemed to move in making their clear, metallic utterances.

"Will you give the court a plain and concise statement of your history, so far as it includes that of the prisoner?"

She instantly, and in the most mechanical manner possible, proceeded to relate, with great clearness, the whole of the incidents as set down in the earlier chapters of this story up to the moment when she fell asleep after partaking of the draught prepared and administered by her husband. She then paused for a moment, and something like abhorrence of making a further revelation passed over

her image-like features. She closed the burning, staring eyes for a second, and then resumed :

“My next conscious experience was of waking in a strange room, with two persons standing near me—one of these the Indian doctor, Uriel, the other my old mulatto nurse, Amy. I was told afterward by the Indian that I had just waked from a long sleep. I have not a vivid nor systematic recollection of what followed for many months, but I became as familiar with the story of my dreadful fate, as it is given in the written statement of the Indian, as a child with a nursery tale. All that is revealed in the Indian's testimony concerning my purpose to die, or suffer any amount of personal anguish, both for myself and my child, is perfectly true, and no other torture could have wrung confession from me except the one that maddened me into frenzied rage against the traitor, rather than expose my husband's crime, who could ignore both my devotion and his crime, in linking his life and my fortune to that of the beautiful woman whom he loved even as he had loathed *me!*”

Bitter and violent with dark passions as these words were, they were so calmly spoken that only in the fiery scintillations of the glittering eyes could their venom be detected.

She then went on to state how she had discovered the fact of Mathew Croft's second marriage, and how she had hastened to blast its brightness and its promise by presenting herself before the newly-wedded pair. She repeated

the conditions she had made with Mathew Croft, that he should receive and treat his daughter and hers as the virtual mistress of his house, and heiress of his fortune, but concealing her real connection with him under such a representation as would best secure her a distinguished position in society, and that Leda should assume the duties of chaperon to the young lady. That so long as all of her (Rachel's) requirements were faithfully observed and complied with, she would remain in such profound obscurity that not even her child should know of her hiding-place; and that, when Faith Hilary should be safely and happily settled in life, she, the unhappy mother, would be as one dead to them all. In the meantime, the stipulations placed the household of Lucerne literally under Rachel's supervision, by means of the agents whom she established there as the instruments by which her will in regard to the girl were to be executed faithfully. It was furthermore agreed that Mathew Croft should at once make a deed of conveyance by which the whole of the property received from Rachel, with the accumulated legal interest, be settled irrevocably upon the girl, "Faith Hilary, and her heirs forever."

This was done, and the deed consigned to the hands of Rachel Croft.

At the close of these statements, Mr. Craig said :

"In the meantime, where was your place of residence?"

By this time the audience were hanging breathlessly upon every word uttered by that terrible and tragic woman,

who had voluntarily made of herself the engine of retribution, crushing out all her humanities, and becoming a mere machine to work out a purpose at once just and vengeful.

At this question a shadow of some fierce emotion trembled over the immovable face of Rachel Croft, the witness. She answered, more slowly, but not less distinctly than before :

“My place of residence was in the midst of the household at Lucerne. I was called *Mrs. Foster, the house-keeper.*”

When she said these words the glowing rays from her wonderful jet irids streamed full upon the face of the prisoner.

Her look seemed to say to him :

“Fancy, if you can, the hell upon earth to which I condemned myself there.”

A visible shudder passed over the body of the prisoner, but he faced the deadly challenge of those mysterious eyes without further sign of emotion.

“What caused you to force the indictment of which this trial is the result :

“My child’s disappearance, and, as we have every reason to believe, death, through the instrumentality of the man introduced to her society by Mr. Croft and *his other wife*, and to whose mercy she was abandoned by their carelessness or neglect.”

“Can you produce the deed made in favor of the

girl, Faith Hillary, by Mathew Croft, the prisoner at the bar?"

"I can. Here it is."

She handed a folded paper to Mr. Craig. It was written in the peculiar hand well known to be that of the prisoner, and signed by him, duly witnessed.

The counsel for the defense was now referred to the witness. As before, he declined to interrogate. Rachel Croft was now dismissed from the stand.

The counsel for the prosecution remained in their seats, awaiting the action of the opposing side. Mr. Dale, the attorney for the defense, kept his place, and the jury and court wore an expectant air.

To the great surprise of all present, the prisoner rose to his feet, his tall, massive figure, in its elegant attire, towering above the heads of the assembly, where he stood on the elevated inclosed platform occupied by the criminal on the trial.

A deep flush overspread Mathew Croft's cold face, as he met the upturned gaze of the multitude whom he had so often addressed amid the admiring plaudits that his reputation and eloquence commanded for his oratory.

He fixed his eyes on the jury.

CHAPTER XXXVIII.

MISTAKEN IDENTITY.

There was not a tremor in the deep-toned voice of the prisoner, as he said, folding his white hands before him, as was his usual custom when beginning to speak :

“May it please the court, and gentlemen of the jury, I have risen to claim for myself that right which our common country grants every citizen accused of a crime, to speak in his own defense. Gentlemen of the jury, you have listened to the most flawless tissue of criminating evidence that it has ever been my misfortune to hear given against any person accused of a crime. It may or may not be truthful evidence. With that I have no concern, since it in no wise relates to myself.”

Here the prisoner made a dramatic pause, letting his eyes seek the ground, while all glances turned on him with amazement.

He then resumed :

“I deny that I am the man to whom that evidence refers. I deny any acquaintance with the woman calling herself Rachel Croft up to the moment when she appeared before me, according to her statement, a week after my marriage last fall, and when, for reasons I will hereafter explain, I agreed to temporize with what I conceived to be

the freak of a mad woman. I call your attention to the evidence that I shall immediately bring forward to prove that at the period named by Rachel Croft and the other witnesses examined against one Mathew Croft, I, your prisoner, was a resident of Chicago, Illinois, and engaged in mercantile pursuits in that city."

At a sign from the prisoner, Mr. Dale placed a witness upon the stand. Mr. Croft proceeded to examine the witness.

"What is your name and occupation."

"My name is Josiah Williams. I am at present a traveling agent for a tin manufactory in Detroit."

"Where did you reside in the spring of 18—?"

"At Chicago. I was then clerk in the grocery store of Acklin & Farmer, — street."

"Have you any knowledge whatever of the prisoner at the bar?"

"I distinctly have. At the time mentioned, the spring of 18—, Mathew Croft, the prisoner at the bar, was the proprietor of a clothing store in — street, Chicago. I frequently bought merchandise of him, and had an intimate personal acquaintance with him."

"Was he at any time absent from his business in Chicago during the year 18—?"

"To my certain knowledge he was not. I saw him almost daily, always passing his store on my way to my place of business, and often stopping to converse with him. I often said to him: 'You were made for better

things than selling clothes.' I was glad when I found he had thrown up merchandise and taken to the law."

"How much longer did he reside in Chicago after studying law?"

"He went away before he began at the bar. I heard of his change of business about two years after his removal from Chicago, in the winter of 18—."

"Where was he practicing?"

"At Memphis."

"Did you see him after that?"

"Yes, twice, as I passed through Memphis on my route southward, traveling for my house."

Another witness was now introduced. His testimony was as follows:

"My name is George W. Wilson. I am a clerk in a dry-goods house in Toronto. I lived for many years in Memphis. I knew the prisoner well when I resided there. He practiced law in a small way at that time. He often transacted business for my employers, Beal & Co., merchants. I left Memphis before he did, but heard from him sometimes after he settled here. He wrote me that a windfall in the shape of a legacy from an old aunt had enabled him to come South and establish himself at ease in his profession in this city. I have heard from him from time to time."

The witness was cross-examined by Mr. Craig, but no discrepancies appeared in his testimony, and he was then dismissed. Letters were then shown and examined, which

substantiated the evidence given in favor of the prisoner. There seemed no shadow of doubt remaining as to a mistaken identity. It was impossible that Mathew Croft, the preacher and the husband of Rachel Croft, could be one with Mathew Croft, the merchant and lawyer, who was clearly proved to have been a man of fair repute, residing in distant States during the periods specified as those which concerned the crime for which the prisoner was on trial.

It remained now to ascertain by some test which of the two Mathew Crofts the prisoner at the bar really was.

Mr. Craig rose and requested permission to put a question to the two witnesses for the defense.

Josiah Williams resumed the stand.

“Mr. Williams, are you aware of any personal peculiarity or physical trait by which you could designate the person to whom your testimony refers?”

“None beyond his general appearance, which seems to me sufficiently marked for any man of ordinary perceptions to swear to with confidence. I am here on oath to declare that the man in the dock is the identical Mathew Croft to whom my testimony refers.”

Mr. Wilson was again interrogated. He said, with an air of sarcastic impatience :

“Having been intimately and kindly associated with a man of Mr. Croft’s uncommon personal abilities and characteristics for a number of years, it seems a little absurd to suppose that I can have the least doubt about his identity, or that I should require an ‘ear-mark’ to designate him.”

Mr. Wilson retired, and Rachel Croft was summoned to reappear.

The same question was propounded to her. She asked for a pencil and piece of paper. It was given her, and she leaned over the table in front of her, and drew something upon the blank surface of the paper. This she handed to Mr. Craig, with the slowly enunciated words :

“If the prisoner at the bar is the Mathew Croft concerning whom my testimony has been given, a mark *like that* will be found upon his right shoulder about three inches from where it joins the neck.”

All eyes turned toward the prisoner as the witness retired to the antechamber.

His face was fairly livid. He shook in every limb.

The judge said :

“Mathew Croft, you have heard the testimony just given by the chief witness for the prosecution in this trial. It is the duty of the court to see that every item of evidence be duly weighed, and that the prisoner be well and truly tried. Mr. Sheriff, you will proceed at once to make the investigation.”

The prisoner rose, and, with convulsive agitation, protested against the indignity to be offered his “sacred person.”

The judge said, solemnly :

“Innocence, Mr. Croft, shrinks from no test which the sacred majesty of the law demands. Mr. Sheriff, do your duty on the prisoner at the bar.”

A profound hush attended the proceedings. The judge held in his hands the slip of paper upon which the woman, Rachel Croft, had drawn a curious diagram. At length the sheriff exclaimed, in a measured voice :

“May it please the court, I find upon the right shoulder of the prisoner, about three inches below the neck, what seems to be the scar of marks burnt into the flesh. Within a diamond-shaped figure are the letters H. P., No. 1,272—1840.”

The judge caused the paper that he held to be given to the jury. The marks upon the paper corresponded to those upon the shoulder of the prisoner.

One by one the jurymen approached the prisoner, and compared the mark on his flesh to the diagram on the paper.

Not a sound succeeded to the stir occasioned by the movements of the jury resuming their places, until the slight derangement of the prisoner's toilet had been repaired.

The countenance of Mathew Croft during this painful scene would have baffled the most skillful physiognomist. If possible, a more rigid repose than ever had settled upon his features—the facial fiber might have been of iron, for all emotion one could detect upon those rugged lineaments.

It was the calmness of a desperate creature. Mere bravado and callous villainy could never have attained to such supereminent control. It was the masterful triumph

of intellectual force over the moral and physical man. It was the pale, unflinching courage that mind casts like a mantle over matter in a moment of supreme danger.

In the midst of this silence the prosecuting attorney, Mr. Craig, rose and faced the jury. Upon a tall, slender form sat a fine, well-balanced head, and from a face of venerable aspect the hair was thrown carelessly back. His features were subdued, and his tones grave and quiet, as he said :

“Gentlemen of the jury, to the evidence given in your hearing to-day, and which will be ably collated for you by his honor, the presiding judge, I have a few words to add.

“The wrecked and blasted remnant of womanhood who stood before you to-day presented a more potent appeal to your sense of justice than all the invectives that eloquence could hurl against the hand that wrought that ruin, so piteous and so complete.

“For the body slain by a murderous blow, or the poisoned draught, our laws demand the body of the murderer as a holocaust to justice. A life for a life, according to the grim Hebraic code.

“But for the murdered heart, the slain hope, the violated trust, the desecrated vows, human justice has not ventured to appoint an adequate atonement. These offenses cry aloud to Heaven for vengeance, and with High God must their punishment remain.

“It is for you, gentlemen, to decide whether Mathew Croft, the prisoner at the bar, is guilty or not guilty of the

attempted murder charged to his account by the evidence laid before you to-day.

“If you shall decide that he is not guilty, it is fair to presume that he will be restored to his high and honorable place in this community, while the poor, deserted woman who accuses him of so horrid an attempt upon her life, and the subsequent appropriation of her property, must retire into her childless and desolate obscurity.

“If you decide that he is guilty, his punishment, under the law, is ‘fine and imprisonment,’ with, of course, the restoration of the ill-gotten gains derived from the devoted magnanimity of the wife, who chose rather to die in want and destitution than expose the crime of the man she loved far better than her life.

“I should not only waste words, but offend your intelligence, gentlemen of the jury, did I dwell further upon the case so fully presented for your judgment. I have only to remind you that in your hands rests the future of that haggard woman, who stands alone in this wide world, called back to it from the very jaws of the grave, and calls to *you* for justice.”

CHAPTER XXXIX.

SENTENCED AND RECLAIMED.

It was now the prisoner's turn to be heard in his own cause, of which he had assumed the management.

He was still very composed, but a tremor in his tones betrayed the shock his nerves had sustained. He said :

“Gentlemen, it is true that an appalling weight has been cast into the balance against me by the discovery that I bear upon my person a mark answering to the description of one drawn by the witness, Rachel Croft. It is needless for me to state to you that a bribe of a few dollars might easily have secured from the deputy of the prison the information which has been made to appear against me in this court. For one who had privileged access to my cell by day and night, and who as often disturbed me in the midst of profound, unconscious slumber or the gloomy reveries of an unhappy prisoner, nothing was simpler than the accidental or premeditated discovery of any distinguishing mark upon my person. This, with one other suspicious circumstance, seems to me the only point worthy to be mentioned in opposition to the clear and positive testimony of two intelligent witnesses, who have disproved my identity with the Mathew Croft of Rachel Croft's tragedy. I refer, gentlemen, to the fact of

my having acceded to the demands of the woman, Rachel Croft, in the matter of receiving her daughter into my house as my maid.

“Let it be remembered that I came to this community a stranger, from that section most obnoxious to the sentiments of this. My speech, manners, opinions, and habits all attested too plainly that I was a Northerner, even had I desired to conceal the fact, which I candidly declare I did not wish to do. I brought with me no credentials, save my professional ability. Despite a bitter opposition, I won for myself a place of distinction at this bar, and finally had the happiness of marrying a woman unsurpassed for her beauty and social consequence in this or any State in the Union.

“Scarcely were these nuptials consummated, when a mad woman, or a fiend with libelous intent, appears upon the scene, and urges the monstrous charges and claims that have this day been published in this house, having first been circulated for weeks through the press, to the vital prejudice of the prisoner whom they attacked. Had I been one of this people, instead of the alien adventurer upon whom all looked with coldness and disaffection, if not absolute suspicion, because of his birthplace and principles, I might boldly have flung the viper from me, and defied her to do her worst, relying upon my established position in your midst and my claim upon the unprejudiced sympathy of my judges.

“But, alas! gentlemen, ‘a stranger in a strange land’

hath need of sober caution as to where he sets his advancing foot. My successes had brought me, perhaps, a few cold admirers, but no friends on whose adherence I could count 'through good and evil report.' I had committed the unpardonable sin of acquiring fortune and popularity by my talent, despite the odium that attached to me as an interloper. And I crowned this offense by marrying a queen of society, and the heiress of one of the oldest names and wealthiest families in the South.

"Was it for me, under these precarious circumstances, to incur a public scandal that would bring the blush of shame to my young bride's cheek, and raise the howl of a prejudiced community against me, when, by secret concessions that would injure no one, but in reality benefit an innocent and beautiful young creature at the cost of a few paltry thousands subtracted from my honestly acquired fortune, I could avoid that *expose*?

"Say, gentlemen, which of *you* would have hesitated to act as I acted, had you been placed as I was placed? Drop by drop I would have spilled my life-blood, rather than that the noble woman, whose honor and fair fame were mine to protect, should have suffered *one* such pang as was threatened her young life by the malice or the madness of the woman calling herself Rachel Croft.

"Which one of *you*, gentlemen of the jury, would have so far forgotten the duties of chivalry and the tenderness of manhood, as to let the heart of a nobly-born, delicately-nurtured orphan girl, still mourning over the new-made

grave of her mother, be wrenched and bruised by the public disgrace of so scandalous a trial as this has been, even if your fortunes, *and your lives*, had been exacted to shield her from it?

“But I shame your innate manhood, and my own, by making a question of what any true man’s duty must be under such an alternative. It has been my misfortune to have sacrificed my natural indignation, and to have enmeshed myself with false appearances—all in vain.

“By one of those unhappy chances which no degree of human prudence could have obviated, the girl over whom I assumed the guardianship has been drowned, in company with one of my wife’s dearest relatives. In this untoward accident have I been made to pay the penalty of this ignominious arrest, imprisonment, and trial.

“When you, gentlemen, shall have proclaimed me innocent, as I feel sure that you will, I shall still have to suffer tortures that not all the verdicts of all the juries of the earth can avert from my heart and my home.

“Who or what can save me from the drooping, shame-laden head of my noble bride? Who or what can turn from my soul the bitter anguish of her woeful eyes? Who or what shall stand between my sight and the shadowy forms of her dead parents, whom I loved, and by whom I was beloved and trusted, when they shall haunt me with reproachful faces for their darling’s misery?

“Pardon me, my fellow-men and my judges, if I entreat you to excuse me from further discussion upon such

minor points as may still remain obscure. I feel that I can safely intrust my cause to your hands as it is. Whatever differences of birth and education may divide us on other questions, we are the sons of one mother, gentlemen, and her name is *Honor*; and her dearest behest to us is to cherish and keep spotless the character of woman."

* * * * *

The very air seemed to tremble around the stalwart forms and rugged faces of the twelve, upon whose heart-strings the speaker's tones had played so cunningly.

With a movement of indescribable dignity, the prisoner resumed his seat. His pale face wore a look of confident calm, and his eyes fixed themselves steadfastly upon the judge, who now addressed himself to the jury. With clear, incisive tones, and a masterly summing up of the evidence, he charged the jury with the prisoner's fate.

The powerful appeal which Mr. Croft had just made to the fair, unbiased judgment of his cause, and his touching allusion to the fact of his isolated position in a community whose feelings and principles on all social and political subjects were naturally averse to his own, had not been lost on the judge, who contented himself with giving the bare facts in the testimony to the consideration of the jury, without any word of comment more than was demanded *ex officio*.

In conclusion, he said :

"This is the whole of the evidence on the part of the prosecution and on the part of the prisoner. On the part

of the prosecution, it is almost entirely circumstantial (the only eye-witness being of no value in point of law), yet so conclusive as to seem incontrovertible. On the part of the prisoner, the testimony is equally conclusive, and more direct, which establishes the fact of mistaken identity.

“It has been demonstrated that the witnesses for the defense were unable to mention any personal peculiarity, or designating mark, that could satisfy the court of their certain acquaintance with the prisoner; while, on the other hand, the chief witness for the prosecution has been able to certify her knowledge of the prisoner by a most unmistakable test.

“It cannot be disputed that it is quite possible for the witness, Rachel Croft, to have obtained surreptitious information from the turnkey of the prison concerning the singular mark upon the right shoulder of the prisoner, and it is for you to decide the plausibility of this idea, taking into consideration all that has been proven and not proven in your hearing, always giving the accused the benefit of a *reasonable* doubt.

“It is for you to form your opinions on the fate of the prisoner apart from all extraneous suggestions, according to the best of your judgment and upon your conscience, and as you shall find out the truth, so you will pronounce your verdict.”

The jury retired from the court-room, and for the space of several minutes a solemn quiet pervaded the crowd.

A man was seen to ascend the rostrum upon which the judge sat, and to converse in a low tone with the dignified official. Some papers were examined between them, and an earnest conversation took place, after which the man withdrew, and stood upon the lowest step of the rostrum beside the sheriff.

Meanwhile the prisoner sat very still, with his face bowed on his hand.

Within the space of half an hour the solid tramp of many feet announced the return of the jury, who marched slowly up the long aisle back to their seats. The foreman, a dark, serious, earnest-looking man, handed the verdict to the clerk.

They had found the prisoner "*Guilty!*"

* * * * *

The prisoner had lifted his head, and confronted the court with an unflinching calmness.

Save for a spasmodic tightening of the lines about his mouth, his face expressed no emotion when he heard the terrible word which consigned his character to public infamy, and his body to a convict's cell for any period of time within a space of thirty years that his judge might decree.

In that instant he beheld the fair fabric that he had builded among men fall in blackened ruins to its foundation stone. Fame, Wealth, Love—the magic trio that circle round the goal of each heart's hope, and each of whose wands had touched his life—seemed in that moment

to mock at him with their cruel laughter as they waved him a final adieu. In their place rose other three, ghastly shapes, that hastened toward him with gibbering smiles and outstretched arms open to embrace him—Disgrace, Poverty, and Despair were their names.

Across this dread, phantasmal picture he heard, as if from far away, the voice of the law's vice-regent pronouncing his sentence :

“Mathew Croft, the offense of which you now stand convicted, is—next to those which immediately affect the State, the Government, and the Constitution of our country—of the blackest dye that man can commit; for, of all felonies, murder is the most horrible, and of all murders, poisoning is the most detestable. Poisoning is a secret art, against which there are no means of preserving or defending a man's life; and as far as there can be different degrees in crimes of the same nature, yours surpasses all that have ever gone before it. The manner in which this dark deed was transacted, and the person on whom it was committed, much enhance your guilt. It was executed under pretext of the tenderest devotion to the most sacred of trusts, and upon the being who, of all the world, should have been shielded with your own life from harm or peril.

“So far as *you* are concerned, your murderous act was a complete act; and, to add to its horror, you accepted the frightful contingency of interring alive the faithful, loving wife, whose only crime had been loving you too

well, and to whose love you owed the fortune which you craved. Probably the greatness of this fortune caused the greatness of your offense; and I am fully satisfied, upon the evidence given against you, that avarice was your motive, and hypocrisy afforded you the means of committing the dark deed. I think it impossible to find any, even of the meanest capacity, among the numerous audience that stand around you, who can entertain a doubt of your guilt.

“The punishment which your crime deserves—which the public has a right to demand, and which I must inflict upon you—is less speedy but more ignominious than death.

“The sentence which I now pronounce upon you is, that you be taken hence to the place allotted for your confinement by the laws of the State, and that you be subject to imprisonment and hard labor among the common convicts of the State Prison for the space of thirty years. That the fortune of sixty thousand dollars which you received from Rachel, your wife, be restored unto her, with the accumulation of legal interest, and that the rest and residue of your possessions be confiscate to the State under whose laws you are judged and punished; and may God be merciful, and bless to you this grievous chastisement for your most grievous offense.”

A dead hush succeeded and endured for the space of a minute.

The prisoner might have been turned to stone for all

sign of life that his face or form emitted. This silence was now broken by the sound of a strange voice, that rang loud and clear through the hall of justice :

“May it please the court, I, Mathew Olden, a police official of the State of Pennsylvania, am here with official orders to arrest one James Cochrane, *alias* William Jones, *alias* Mathew Croft, an escaped convict from the State Prison in the year 18—, under sentence *for life*, for the crime of burglary and homicide. The said James Cochrane, *alias* William Jones, *alias* Mathew Croft, will be found to have a brand upon his right shoulder, inflicted according to law upon all convicts sentenced for life.”

The judge alone of all present seemed prepared for this denouement to the dismal drama. In a quiet tone, he said :

“Mr. Sheriff, let your prisoner be delivered into the hands of the State official of Pennsylvania. Under the law, the greater punishment includes the less, and the former sentence takes precedence over the latter.”

A low, deep sound, like a groan wrenched from the depths of some mortal agony, escaped from the breast of the prisoner as the hand of the chief of police closed upon his branded shoulder.

CHAPTER XL.

LEDA'S HOST.

It is now almost a month since the exciting incidents of the trial and imprisonment of the criminal, Mathew Croft.

Gossip has expended herself (beg pardon if the feminine pronoun is incorrect) upon the details of the dark story of his former and latter crimes, and vituperation has done its worst with the name of the convict.

As to the strange, silent woman, Rachel Croft, whose dismal form has flitted like some "perturbed spirit" through this history, who rose, shadow-like, from her hiding-place, to confront the author of her woes at the bar of justice, and then was seen no more, not a trace has been discovered since the moment she disappeared from the witness-stand.

Rumor declares that "Mr. Craig, the prosecuting attorney, *must* know of her whereabouts, since no one *else* knows," and, as this seems to be quite as good a reason as rumor generally has for her opinions, we shall accept and pass it by.

A few days after the trial, Gordon Warren was able to be removed from Lucerne to his own home. At his earnest

solicitation, Miss Draper consented to remain for the present with Leda.

But the terrible fate that Leda had invoked when she laid her life upon the altar of Mammon overtook her almost immediately after Gordon Warren and his mother quitted the roof that sheltered her.

The next day "a writ of ejectment" from the Lucerne property, now the possession of Mrs. Croft, was served upon the once haughty and beautiful mistress of Lucerne.

She was granted the space of one week to make her arrangements for departure from the threshold of her ancestral home.

Penniless, homeless, *nameless*, and almost friendless, this proud, vain, heartless woman was to face the world, whose smiles she had so long coquetted with, for whose frowns she had no courage.

Not one of all the bright circle that had once encompassed her with adulation came near the lone woman, who was neither maid, widow, nor wife, but a wrecked existence, standing solitary in the midst of the chaos she had created around herself by the cold-blooded barter of her womanhood for worldly gains.

The moment that Gordon Warren heard of this last stroke of Leda's fell destiny, he sent his mother to bring her to their modest home as a guest.

Miss Draper returned to her friends in New England, and, after this adjustment of affairs, the days glided on for a month.

Leda had accepted the cordial invitation of the Warrens to bring her faithful Roxana to the asylum which they had offered, as peasants might open their doors to a sovereign.

The most deferential kindness from mother and son characterized the hospitality which these simple folk extended to the unfortunate Leda.

Naturally she remained in severe retirement during the first weeks of her sojourn at the cottage, never leaving her own room, unless to join her host and hostess for half an hour on the dusky twilit porch.

During this period the young lawyer was too feeble for the regular labors of his profession, nevertheless he spent almost the whole of each day in his office, overlooking such papers as related to his connection with his disgraced partner, Mathew Croft, and transacting any pressing business.

He had a twofold object in thus absenting himself so continuously from his home—a delicate regard for what the neighbors might say if he bestowed much of his presence upon the house inhabited by the beautiful unfortunate, and also a mistrust of Leda's own conduct and feelings toward him.

The more he reflected upon the painful scene that had transpired between them the evening before her final and public humiliation the more he shrank from any association with her, beyond what courteous hospitality and considerate kindness demanded of him.

It became his painful duty to examine into his former partner's connection with the estate of Leda's mother, and to discover how shamefully it had been embezzled by the arts of the unscrupulous villain to whose management it had been intrusted. But, by dint of an honorable deception, he was able to make it appear that Leda was the possessor of a few thousands, which were placed at her credit in the bank of the State.

It is needless to inform the reader that this deposit was made from the private fortune, small as it was, of the self-appointed guardian of her interests, Gordon Warren.

When he had finally effected this arrangement, he desired his mother to request their guest to be brought to him for a moment into the little library.

Placing in Leda's hand a paper, he said :

"In this document you will find, my friend, a statement of the trifling remnant which remains of your dear mother's estate, and which has been placed at your disposal in a bank deposit subject to your instructions. I need not add that I have been happy to render you this small service, nor that in all things I am ready to aid and care for you as if you were my own dear sister."

Light and swift as the accentuation on the last word was, it caused Leda's cheek to glow hotly ; but her eyes were sad and supplicating when she raised them from the paper which Warren had given her, to let them rest full upon his noble face.

She seemed hardly able to speak. Her lips murmured

a low, broken "Thank you. How good you are to me!"

A few days went by after this before Leda made any further allusion to what had taken place.

One evening, after their early and simple tea, the good Dame Warren left her son to finish his cigar on the porch alone with their sad, fair guest, who sat apart under the drooping cluster of a lamarque rose that covered one end of the little piazza.

Her face shone white as an angel's, and almost as beautiful, against the dense blackness of her garments. One of the pure pale roses gleamed among the rich dark masses of her braided hair, and the luster of her splendid eyes glowed through the dim starlight. Warren lounged on the steps a little way from her feet, his cigar-end blinking like a glow-worm in the dark, and its warm fumes mingling sweetly with the fragrance of the dewy roses. He was not in the least conscious of how well his handsome figure was displayed in the careless reclining pose he had assumed for comfort, not becomingness.

His head rested against the wooden column of the porch, his face was upturned to the solemn stars that lit it palely, and the dark, glossy hair fell away in silky curls from his clear, calm brow.

"Where are your thoughts all this while? I do not think you have even breathed for half an hour," said Leda, who had not taken her eyes from the prone form of the young athlete for some time.

He puffed out a mouthful of smoke before he answered.

"I could not tell you just where my thoughts were, because they were far afloat in space," he sighed, ever so softly, as he paused, but she heard it, and said :

"They were sad thoughts, it seems."

"Yes; very, very sad! They had traveled, as they often do, in search of the whitest soul that ever tenanted a mortal frame. Poor little Faith's image haunts me by day, and visits my dreams at night. The child seems to be calling me to her somewhere in the vast unknown whither she has vanished. I could almost believe that she is still in the flesh, so strangely do I feel about her sometimes."

"That is sheer nonsense. It has been months since they disappeared, and only the ocean could have kept Julian Vernois from his old haunts for that space of time. Poor things! It was and it is so dreadful to lose them so!"

Warren made no reply, but smoked on silently till Leda said :

"How I envy you that delicious, soothing accompaniment to your solitary musings, or solace for your sad ones."

"What?"

"Your cigar."

"Have one?"

"Oh, no; but I would like it. I think sometimes I shall go mad with my dreary thoughts, and, at such times, I fancy it would ease me to lie and smoke as you are doing."

Her tone was infinitely pathetic; it touched Warren keenly in his tender, manly soul, for he knew how dreary and bitter indeed must be her thoughts very often. He tried to speak cheerily to brighten her.

“Ah, yes, I can imagine; but then there are other things you can do for diversion which I cannot. I frequently think what an endless source of amusement you women must find in your pretty needle-work.”

“Perhaps; but I am not blessed with any of those engaging accomplishments. Mamma would never let me learn to work in any way.”

“It is not too late now—you are still so young.”

“And, you might add, ‘so poor that work would become you.’”

The words were very bitter; they dropped like gall from her lips.

“It would comfort and sustain you,” said Warren, gravely and gently, not seeming to have noticed the self-scorn of her remark.

“I wish, then, I knew how and where to begin.”

“My mother will teach you; she loves all kinds of work, and it makes her happy, and fills up many a lonely hour.”

“Where would you advise me to begin? With scrubbing? Ha! ha!”

The ghastly mockery of her laugh, and the suppressed disdain of her tone, showed how the pain of poverty was hurting her proud heart.

Warren could have wept over her, if tears could have eased the deep wound ; but he said compassionately, yet with serious dignity :

“How you wrong yourself, when you feel and speak like that.”

“Ah, my God ! place yourself as I am, and you will not wonder that I feel and speak like that !”

She uttered the words with a choking, sobbing voice, and put her head down on her knees in a convulsion of passionate weeping.

It was all very unwomanly and unworthy for her to act so—to accept dependence and then revile herself for it ; but, remembering all that her life had been, Warren pitied her with a brave man’s strong pity. He rose, flung away his cigar, and, walking to where she sat, bowed and shaken, he rested his hand on her chair, and said, softly :

“Be patient, my sister ; it is all very dreadful for you now, I know, but there is never anything in life so bad but that with courage and endurance we may amend it. Be worthy of yourself and your proud old name. You are unfortunate, but not dishonored ; *command* for yourself the respect of the world who has witnessed your calamity, and, perhaps, is mean enough to be glad of it. Assert the only true sovereignty of noble birth, and show yourself nobler and stronger than the herd who would trample your former prestige in the dust of your present misfortunes. I will help you.”

“Ah ! what can I do ?” she sobbed, drearily.

For the moment she was humbled and subdued under the sweet weight of this grand heart's pity. For the moment she strove to be worthy of his respect.

"Not much, right now; but we shall find ways. To resolve must be the first thing."

"Only show me how to become useful and helpful, and you shall see how I will try."

"Yes. Dry your tears now and go to sleep. We shall see what can be thought of."

She obeyed him meekly, and listened for an hour to his firm, even tread passing and repassing on the starlit porch beyond the windows of her chamber. She lay in feverish excitement on her pillow, wondering how much nearer that night had brought her to her old place in that great heart.

But there was nothing that answered her in the quick, steady steps as they came and went. She heard them repeated in her dreams long after all was silent in the cottage, but even in her dreams they revealed nothing.

CHAPTER XLI.

"TEARS, IDLE TEARS!"

The next morning, instead of having a late breakfast served in her room as usual, Leda appeared at the cozy little round table just as the widow and her son were about to begin the early morning meal. Mrs. Warren expressed surprise, and said she hoped Leda had not hurried or disturbed herself; but Warren smiled approvingly, as he drew his own chair out for her to be seated. Not expecting a third person, another one had to be placed.

After breakfast, when Warren was lighting his matutinal consolation, just before setting off to his office, he heard Leda say to his mother, in the next room :

"Won't you let me do the teacups for you this morning?"

"Oh, *dear*, no! the hot water will *ruin* your pretty white hands."

"It hasn't ruined yours."

"The *looks* of 'em it has; but I'm old, and don't mind wrinkles."

"Never mind; let me help you, if you please."

"Then just take the napkin and dry them as I scald,"

said the old lady, not liking to seem unwilling to accept the proffered help, though much she marveled at it.

Warren gave no sign of having heard, but took care to pass through the dining-room on his way out, and, stopping a minute in front of Leda, said :

"You've no idea how the little household toils become a woman ; they beautify an ugly one, and enhance a beautiful one. Eh, mother?"

"I don't know about that, my son ; but it's natural and pleasant, I think, to see a woman always busy at something useful."

The words were too mild and kind to give offense, or even rebuke.

Some days later Warren, contrary to his habit, remained at home for a little while after dinner. He waited in the sitting-room until Mrs. Warren found something to call her away, and then said to Leda, in his gentle way :

"I have thought of and arranged something for you which will, I hope, be both agreeable and profitable. Instead of allowing your elegant piano to remain boxed up in a warehouse, where it now lies, and your skill as a musician to deteriorate from want of practice, why not have a music-class, and, at the same time that you increase your slender income, you will have an occupation congenial to your tastes and not unbecoming to yourself. What do you say?"

Leda's face had grown scarlet at the bare idea of teaching the daughters of parvenu trades-people for hire, or,

what was worse, the children of her peers and former rivals in the society world of —. But she was ashamed to confess so mean a pride, with those noble, calm eyes of Gordon Warren on her. She said :

"I would do so cheerfully, but I cannot turn your house into a music-school. And how will I get the scholars?"

"As to the first matter, it will be both pleasanter and more profitable for you, as well as more independent, to have a music-room in a more central portion of the city. This I can obtain for you at a moderate sum per month. As to the scholars, an advertising card in the papers will secure them, your brilliant proficiency is so well known here. I have already engaged three pupils for you from my personal friends ; others will follow."

Leda shuddered through every fiber of her thoroughbred aristocracy at the thought of seeing her own name upon a vulgar advertising card among *other* plebeian notices. But she was playing now for a stake that required every card in her hand to be well thrown. She bit her patrician lip to keep the angry protest back, and Warren mistook her emotion for pained embarrassment. *He* could not even conceive of such puerile hesitation.

"You are so very kind to think of all this," she said, dropping her languid lids slowly, and looking her loveliest.

"I should be very unkind not to think of everything to make you more comfortable. I may, then, consider

it all settled, and at once publish your card and engage the room?"

"Yes, of course."

"You can begin on Monday; this is Friday."

He went away, hoping he had helped her to take the first step toward honorable independence.

"I shall escort you as far as your music-room this morning," said Warren, as they rose from breakfast on the Monday appointed for Leda to begin her life of self-help. He knew she would feel pained to pass alone and on foot along the public thoroughfares, where formerly she rolled by in a luxurious coach with emblazoned panels and liveried slaves.

Leda had given herself no manner of concern to inquire after or assist in the arrangements necessary for her new vocation. She did not even know to what street or house she was going when she appeared, closely veiled, to join Warren upon the cottage porch.

A walk of fifteen minutes brought them to the foot of a flight of steps which led from the sidewalk of one of the principal streets to a room situated over a milliner's store, and which could be entered from the outside by means of these steps. Warren explained, as he handed Leda up the stairway :

"The whole house belongs to Mrs. Mackey, the milliner, who is a clever old widow lady, with two daughters. They occupy all of the rooms above the store save this one. I thought it best for you to be here in case you

might have bad weather sometimes, and could stop over a few hours with the family; they are kind, respectable people."

Leda knew them well enough; she had bought ribbons from them sometimes.

"One of the girls will take lessons of you for the rent of the room," he added, as he opened the door of a neat, snug apartment. A fresh matting on the floor, white linen blinds at the four windows, a few straw chairs, and her own grand piano-forte, constituted the furnishing of the room, together with a table for music that stood near the handsome instrument. "Your first scholar, Mollie Mackey, will come up to you directly. I will go down and let her know. Can I do anything more for you this morning?"

She shook her head, for she could not trust her voice to speak. Her face was very pale, and her lips quivered. It was all so new and strange, and the woman had only a false, vain pride, and no true courage, to help her through her sore strait.

Warren felt it best to leave her. He smiled encouragingly as he waved her adieu and went down the steps to his office.

She stood at the window watching his tall, spare form, till it disappeared round a corner.

Miss Mackey soon made her entrance before the music teacher, *Mrs.* Leda Morgan—so her name appeared on the card of advertisement.

Four young ladies, more or less plebeian, but quite able to pay the somewhat expensive price that Warren had affixed to the terms offered by one of the most superb amateur musicians to be found in the whole country, filled up the first day's list of pupils. At the end of a week, Leda found that she had as many scholars as she could possibly attend to. Some through pure kindness, others through malice, and others because of self-interest—the townfolks promptly gave their patronage to the new teacher, of whose unfortunate condition the whole community were gossiping.

Leda was thus, almost without an effort of her own will, and certainly without any personal exertion, placed in a position of respectability and independence.

Decency should have instructed her that she must not any longer accept the hospitality of her friends; but she had her reasons for choosing to remain at the cottage.

On the second morning of her venture, Warren had said to her:

"I will not wait for you to-day. It may cause unpleasant remarks for you if I am your invariable escort to the music-room. You will understand this; but I am always near enough to attend to any business, or render any service that you may require. You see, I want to teach you to be self-reliant at once."

He went away, and, when Leda reached the music-room an hour after, she found a vase of lovely wet roses on the piano awaiting her.

Her cheek flushed with pleasure. She knew well whose thoughtful hand had thus brightened the little room for her day's labors.

And so it happened often. Sometimes flowers, often a new book, or basket of fresh fruits, would greet her as she entered the little upper chamber in the millinery.

But of Warren she saw less than ever. His health had improved, and his business increased, so that he often worked late into the night, merely taking his meals at home.

His manner to Leda was always the same—gentle, thoughtful, fraternally kind, but grave; and though he was universally cheerful, there seemed to be a profound preoccupation in his air and expression. This might arise from business cares. Leda contented herself with thinking so, and her secret hope grew strong within her that his heart was surely leaning to its old fondness. She could put no other construction upon his unvarying consideration for her and his covert attentions. But his self-contained manner puzzled her strangely. Her presence or her absence seemed alike to him, so far as any manifestation of personal feeling. If she came unexpectedly before him, he always met her with the quiet smile that seemed to say, "It is well"—only this. If she left his company, no anxious glance followed her.

After awhile this became monotonous, and, of all things, Leda abhorred monotony; she had lived so much in a changeful whirl of excitement. She determined on

a diversion ; she would rouse him to the startling fact that her brilliant presence in his home was by no means a fixed fact. She had purposely remained in it long enough to stamp herself upon it, and to breathe about its prim, fresh chambers a wonderful something of her regal and voluptuous beauty ; to fill its atmosphere with the soft, subtle odors that floated ever about her, like the incense around "the Paphian's" shrines.

If he were a man, and not a mere human being with brains, he *must* have become sensible of all this rich, exuberant charm of her presence.

"I want to talk with you for a minute this evening," she said, touching Warren's arm with her fingers as they passed from the tea-table ; and then added, shyly, "that is, if you are not in a *very* great hurry to get back to your office."

"I am never 'in a hurry' when you require my attention," he said, sweetly, as he drew two chairs to the center-table, where a solar lamp burned softly.

Leda took one, and he placed himself opposite, assuming an attentive and interested air.

"I want to consult you on a little matter of business. I have decided to take another room from Mrs. Mackey—the large one adjoining my music-room."

"What do you want with another?"

"Why, to live in."

He seemed in no wise shocked ; but asked, gently :

"Are you not comfortable here?"

"Oh, yes, very; and—and so happy."

She murmured the last words tenderly, while her cheek bloomed out like a new-blown rose.

"Why change, then?"

"Well, because I think it might be best. The weather is sometimes bad for me to walk through the streets; and, on all accounts, I think I should do this."

"You know that you are ever so welcome here, and it would be lonely for you to board."

Her heart throbbed gladly in her bosom, for his tone was regretful and insistent.

"Ah, yes, do not remind me of *that*; it has required all my courage to make the resolve."

"Are you thinking that it will be a more independent and dignified position for you than to stay on with us?"

"Yes; just that," she answered, softly, and lowering her lids.

He was silent for awhile.

She breathed heavily and excitedly, wondering what would come from those chaste, firm lips that were pressed thoughtfully together under their black, silken mustache.

Warren was looking down upon a flower that he held. It seemed a great while to Leda before he raised his face a little, and said, with his accustomed gentleness:

"Perhaps you are right. I had not thought of it in that light, but I can understand. I want you to do what will make you happiest, of course."

She felt as if some one had given her a blow that

deadened her senses for a minute. All the soft, warm color went out of her face. As she did not speak, he said :

"Have you spoken to Mrs. Mackey?"

"Yes. She consents to let me have the whole suite—music-room, chamber, and dressing-room—and to furnish my meals, at \$25 per month, including Mollie's lessons."

"That is wonderfully cheap ; and, if you like the place, I think you could not do better."

"Yes ; I do like it. They are nice, quiet people, and keep things neatly. I should furnish all the rooms from my own things."

"That would be pleasanter, and your furniture is doing no good where it is. Shall I make any arrangements about it for you?"

"Thank you ; if you would engage some one to assist Roxana to unpack and place such things as she will select from it, I will be very glad."

"Certainly I will whenever you wish ; but there's hurry about it, eh?"

He asked the question in his soft, courteous way, but there seemed to be no special anxiety in it.

"The sooner the better, I think," she replied.

"Very well ; I shall see a man to-morrow, and the next day it can be done, if you like ; but, pray, do not worry about getting away from us. We shall miss you much."

He was on his feet now, had taken his hat, and seemed about to go. There were tears trembling on Leda's

lashes. He felt she was in pain, yet hesitated about what to say more.

He came and stood near her, resting his fingers on the table at her side; the softly-toned golden rays of the lamp fell over her beautiful bowed face, and the drops on her lashes glistened like jewels. His man's heart was moved by her aspect of sorrow. He said:

"My friend, if you think best to leave us, I will not urge you to stay, though I could wish you to be less in haste to depart. You are the wisest judge of what is most expedient for you, but remember always that, no matter where you are, I am still your friend, and, when you need me, your brother. And this shall be home to you when you care to come to us."

She leaned her forehead on his arm for a minute, and her tears rained down on his hand; then, with an impulsive movement, she rose and quitted the room.

He took forth his delicate cambric handkerchief and wiped the rain of her tears from his hand—reverently enough, it is true, but as he would have dried away the drops from any other sad woman's eyes. He then left the cottage.

CHAPTER XLII.

THE LOST IS FOUND.

Deeply chagrined and disappointed, no doubt, yet by no means despairing, Leda established herself in her new lodging, which, on some accounts, was preferable to her tastes. The simple but commodious apartments over the millinery were wonderfully transformed by the introduction of elegant furniture, hangings, and decorations, which were all that remained to Leda of her once magnificent home. The little music-room became an exquisite boudoir, where delicate mauve draperies, and rare roses, and statuettes, and bric-a-brac breathed to the sweet summer wind sweeping over them tales of a forgotten splendor.

When the day was done, and the pupils, with their nervous hands and badly learned lessons, were out of sight, and, what was better, out of hearing, it was not a bad place for Leda to spend her evenings, had she possessed the least talent in the world for entertaining herself.

Throughout her holiday youth there had never been any need that she should learn that most valuable of all accomplishments, since there were always so many ready and willing to entertain her. Sometimes Warren stopped in

for a little talk with her at twilight on his way home to tea, but he rarely staid long.

Once she said to him, as he moved to go away :

“Why do you go? I am so lonely here. You might sometimes give me a whole evening, as in the old days.”

“It would be pleasant for me,” he said, gravely ; “but these are not the old days, and people might talk of you. You cannot be too careful, and it is better to be lonely than have unpleasant comments. I will come with mother sometimes whenever she can walk so far.”

But oftener that he came he would stop at the door of the shop below, and ask Mollie to run up with flowers or fruits to Leda, from his mother.

It was true that he did miss her presence from the neat little cottage, as one might miss a great splendid rose from a bed of modest pinks and daisies, but she would have been consumed with wounded vanity had she known how much more freely he breathed the sweet, pure air that no longer was laden with the subtle perfumes that exhaled from her magnificent hair and the clinging folds of her soft black robes.

He lingered more at home now that her dark, humid eyes were no longer there to follow his movements ; and the placid old face of his mother, in its spotless white cap, was a more soothing and healthful picture for his passing glance to rest on than Leda's pure oval cheek, with its rich peach bloom, or its alabaster luster.

He had come to wonder at himself for the old madness

that had drawn him to that gorgeous beauty, as the poisoned chalice of an Eastern jungle flower draws the bee to drink and die. And, thinking on the fierce fever of that vanished time, a cold, shuddering aversion would creep through his blood.

Verily, her wand was broken !

A short time after Leda's removal to her new lodgings, the busy fates gathered up and mended a broken thread in the curious web into which her life was being woven without her will.

One day Gordon Warren took from the package of letters delivered at his office one addressed to "Messrs. Croft & Warren, Attorneys-at-Law." Many thus directed had come to him since the tragic dissolution of copartnership, but this one bore a foreign postmark. He opened it carelessly, supposing it related to some mercantile claim for his collection ; but his heart leapt to his mouth as he saw drop from the large business letter a little envelope, addressed to Mr. Croft, in Faith Hilary's delicate, round hand, that he had learned to know and love so well during his long illness, when each day's offering of flowers from the girl came, attended with a word of affectionate inquiry penned in the free, light characters that now held his gaze.

It was as if he had suddenly caught the sound of a voice from the other world, or as if some shadow of passing spirits had fallen athwart his sight.

For a little while he trembled with mingled awe and

gladness. Then he broke the seal and tenderly unfolded the sheets of thin, closely-written paper, upon which Faith had set down a brief history of the strange incidents through which she had passed.

The letter began :

“My dear guardian.”

It was not addressed to him, yet Warren felt that to him alone in all the world it now appealed. Dizzy with contending sensations, he read rapidly through the letter once, and then put it down to take his breath, and to thank God for the safe delivery of the guileless young creature who told of her most appalling perils with the sweet, ingenuous *naivete* that showed how little she had been able to appreciate all of their dread possibilities.

Cold drops of mortal terror for what *might* have befallen this white dove, this exquisite Una among the lions, still stood upon Warren’s brow after he had learned from the recital that Faith was then safe and well, in a beautiful home, with kind friends.

She prayed her guardian to come at once and bring her “back home.”

“Alas, poor little one! Where *is* her ‘home?’” said Warren, half aloud, as he turned to the letter which inclosed Faith’s, and which was merely a formal business communication from Mr Godfrey, assuring Mr. Croft that his ward would be safely and tenderly cared for until he should send or come for her.

A whirl of strange feelings confused Gordon Warren’s

brain, so that he found it difficult to rouse himself to the fact that he was not the victim of some hallucination. All the vague, mysterious ideas about her spirit's haunting him came back to his thoughts now in vivid shape. He tried to read over her letter once more, but he could not; he was too tremulous; his hand shook, his brain swam; he felt he must have some human sympathy to steady his nerves.

Of course, Faith's unhappy mother must be apprised of her safety at once, if that were possible. With this purpose in view, Warren repaired to Mr. Craig's office, and, without stating the facts that had just come to his knowledge, he questioned Mr. Craig of Rachel's present residence.

"I have not the least idea where to find her, nor have I any address by which to communicate with her," said Mr. Craig, in reply.

"Is it possible that *you* are in ignorance of her hiding-place also?"

"Utterly so. I hold certain papers of hers, relating to a large deposit of \$120,000 in gold, now lying at her credit in the State Bank; but my instructions are to retain these papers, and to preserve the most sacred secrecy with regard to their contents, until I shall receive further instructions from her, or until I know that she is *dead*. In the latter case, I am to administer upon her will, which is among these papers left in my charge."

Profoundly perplexed, Warren left Mr. Craig's office,

and decided to stop with Leda and communicate to her the joyful news of Faith's safety. In his bewildering delight on this account, he seemed to have forgotten, or to ignore his former resentment and mistrust of Leda concerning the unaccountable disappearance of the child from her protection.

It was almost dark on the street when he reached the millinery, and was shown up to Leda's apartments; the lamp was lighted in her sitting-room, and she sat by the table, reading.

'What has happened?' she exclaimed, the moment she saw Warren's face.

No wonder; it seemed transfigured, as if his soul were ablaze behind it.

"Faith is found—is safe!" was all he could say for a minute.

Well for Leda that he had bent his head over the letter he had taken from his pocket, and therefore did not catch the look of blank dismay that came to her face. He mistook her silence for a rush of glad emotion akin to that which had stunned him at first. With nervous haste, he proceeded to read aloud from her letter. He was glad to have some other loving heart to throb with his own over the hair-breadth escapes and blood-curdling perils of the child's desperate adventures. He read rapidly at first, but soon more slowly, as if to take in the full meaning of each word. He did not remember, nor care, that it was Leda who listened; it was a human creature who had known

Faith. With a less powerful stimulus to intuition than graded her acute perceptions, Leda must have seen how delirious with gladness the man's soul was.

By the time he reached the end of the letter her heart was in a frenzy of jealous rage.

What was this girl, this mere child, to him, that his tones should tremble and thrill with her name, when *she*, the glorious woman, had failed to stir an emotion to life in his breast?

As he concluded the last sentence, Leda said, with a withering scorn on her lips and in her accent:

"Poor, stupid creature! Who on earth does she imagine will be weak-minded enough to believe such an ill-told fable?"

Warren dropped the letter, and started as if some one had struck him. His eyes opened wide with indignant amaze, as he said:

"Who that knows *her* would doubt one syllable of it?"

"Come, my dear friend, that is sheer quixotism. Faith is a silly girl, it is true, but in person and years she is a *woman*."

"Well, and what of it?"

"Everything to render *that* story preposterous. In the first place, who that knows Julian Vernois would give the benefit of a doubt to any girl, not absolutely a *fright*, who had been to sea *with him* for two weeks aboard a privateer, manned by two desperado sailors and one heathen?"

"I, madam, would swear that she is this moment as pure and as innocent as an angel!"

His tones were so sharp and stern that they cut the air, and his face was pallid with anger.

Leda was too fairly roused to think or care for consequences now. She laughed satirically, as she said:

"I fear, then, you will swear to unbelievers. The days of miracles are past, and men like Julian Vernois are stubborn facts in the path of credulous young damsels, and still some credulous knights like yourself. In the first place, what induced her to go off in that boat with him at that time in the evening?"

"You know well enough that she is impulsive and thoughtless as any child. He was a scoundrel for taking her."

"Perhaps. I've nothing to say for *his* prudence; indeed, his best friend couldn't praise Julian's delicate consideration for a pretty girl who was foolish enough to run away with him."

This was a little more than Warren's patience could bear. Had she been a man, most likely that speech would have been her last. As it was, he said, through his set teeth:

"As well as you know that you live, you know that you utter an insinuation that is false and cruel."

"I am candid enough to *say* what all the world, save yourself, will *think*, and few will hesitate to proclaim aloud just the sent sentiment I have expressed."

"Then had they best wear the shield that protects you, madam. Excuse me if I decline to listen further to your most unworthy remarks."

He had already gathered up the letters, and now strode from Leda's presence, trembling in every nerve. There was only one feeling alive in his breast—the wild, aching desire to clasp and shield the fair white creature, whom tongues like that woman's would seek to sting to death with their venom.

The next day Leda learned, through Roxana, that Gordon Warren had left the city. She needed no oracle to tell her whither his steps were bound.

CHAPTER XLIII.

A MEETING.

"A young gentleman to see Miss Hilary, mum," announced a tidy English housemaid, who entered a charming sitting-room on the upper floor of Mr. Theodore Godfrey's delightful home on the South American coast.

An elderly lady and three young girls were talking and sewing together when thus interrupted.

"Who can be wanting to see Miss Hilary?" said Faith, stopping short in the midst of a merry laugh, provoked by Leila Godfrey's wit.

“Come, now, Miss Hilary, don’t put on airs; you know quite well that you’ve made an outright capture of the Hon. George Montfort—stolen incontinently from me. I’ll bet anything on earth it is the Hon. George!”

Miss Godfrey assumed a severe tone in alleging this charge against her lovely young guest, but her pretty dimpled face did not corroborate the indignation of her tone.

“What nonsense, Leila! The Hon. George wouldn’t know me again, unless, perhaps, he should meet me with you.”

“That’s all very nice for you to say, but I guess I know who he danced with three several times at the Chiltons’ party last week, and whose cloak he so tenderly folded round somebody’s shoulders, and the longing, lingering look of his eyes in ‘the last good-night.’ I’ve been looking for this sequel to that evening every day since. Oh, my prophetic soul! My uncle! George!”

The witticism was not, in fact, very pungent, but it provoked a silvery shower of laughter from three sweet young throats, and, quite overcome with embarrassment at the idea of being individually summoned to the parlor to receive a visit from the Hon. George Montfort, lieutenant-governor of the province, Faith rose from the low rocking-chair.

“Is my hair all right?” she asked, timidly, of Leila, whose bright eyes wore no envious glance, as she swept them from head to foot over the little nymph-like figure of her friend.

"When was it ever wrong, I wonder? When you wake up in the morning it lies as smooth and shiny as mine after an hour's brushing. Yes, you're all right—don't alter a curl—you're altogether too captivating to suit my fancy, just as you stand, Miss Hilary."

Faith blushed and smiled, and her slender white fingers arranged the knot of pale rose silk that fastened a lace ruff at the throat of the bright blue lawn dress that she wore.

Miss Godfrey was not wrong when she called the girl "captivating." It was just the word for Faith. It was a little wonderful, too, what a change a few months in the tropics—preceded by those trying weeks of endurance, which had acted upon her nature as a forcing-glass on a plant, and brought to the light all of the subtle latent powers of womanhood, had made in the *personnel* of our little heroine.

The almost infantile expression that belonged to the child of sixteen, who left Lucerne that bright spring morning months ago, had given place to a look of tender and sweet maturity, not unmingled with pathos; for, despite her happy life with these kind strangers, there was often a deep and yearning sadness in Faith's heart—the sorrow of the exile longing for home and the dear faces that affection, that cunningest limner, has stamped on the soul.

Added to this, the soft, voluptuous climate and beautiful scenery of those magical latitudes had developed both the physical and æsthetical nature of the girl to a surprising extent.

She was a little taller, very much more symmetrical, and the curves of her form were of a fuller and richer outline, the bloom on her cheek of a deeper hue, the shades of her gold-brown hair of darker tones, and the dreamful glory of her soft, womanly eye had a quality of magnetism. It was hard to loose one's gaze from its clear, candid look.

As Faith quitted the circle of her friends to descend to the parlors, Mrs. Godfrey said to her daughters :

"It's no wonder the child creates a sensation in our social gathering, she is so wonderfully soft and lovely, like one of those Southern roses, and just as fresh and pure."

"How I wish she belonged to us!" sighed Leila. "I'm in terror of my life every day lest we shall hear of her old guardian's arrival, or get orders to ship her back to him."

"It is so sweet of her never to seem anxious or homesick, yet I know that she often is—I can see it when the sad, far-away look comes into her eyes," said Alice, the younger of the Godfrey sisters.

While she was being thus discussed, Faith was slowly descending the broad stairway to the handsome saloon that opened upon the hall below, and where she expected to find Sir George Montfort, of whose attentions Miss Godfrey affected such envy.

Indeed, Faith was by no means as ignorant as she chose to appear of the intense admiration that the young English baronet had manifested two evenings previously when she attended a soiree with her friends.

The remembrance of his warm, eager glances called a brighter tinge of color to her face as she entered the dim coolness of the azure-tinted chamber.

The tall and grandly-proportioned form of her visitor was outlined before her against the light of a veiled window at the end of the room, where he stood turning the leaves of a small portfolio of drawings.

Faith had not taken many steps toward him when she halted suddenly, and pressed her hands together, with a low, startled exclamation.

The visitor turned round, and, with one long stride, as it seemed, reached her side.

“My little Faith!”

It was all he said, or could say. His hands were clasping each of hers, and her cheek was leaning against his arm, while she kept saying over and over, softly:

“Oh, Mr. Warren! Mr. Warren! I am so glad—so glad!”

He could tell by the panting movement of her bosom, and the low, sobbing sighs, that a great upheaval of joy was going on in the girl's breast; but she did not cry, nor go into ecstasies. He led her in silence to a sofa, and sat down by her, still holding both of her hands, still feeling the warmth of her cheek pressed close to his arm.

The old days had come back to her—she felt herself only a little child near this great, strong, quiet man.

After awhile he put his hand under her chin and raised her face. It was calmer, but flushed with a great glad-

ness, and her eyes overflowed with a wonderful light of thanksgiving.

In that moment the man's soul seemed to become enveloped in a cloud of glory.

The apocalyptic vision of a new heaven and a new earth, that once, and only once, in a human life crosses the spirit's sight, was before him. He had lost and deeply mourned for a bright, pure, tenderly-loved child, who had been to his heart as a pet bird that must be nursed, and cared for, and caressed. He found her an exquisite woman, with all the mystical, entrancing exhalations of passion and poesy floating about her, and all the unconscious potency of her sex trembling in her soft beauty.

There was neither madness, nor fever, nor pain, nor reluctance in the utter rendering up of all his being to the sweet bewilderment of *this* woman's presence.

For the first time he was conscious of the wide difference between *infatuation* and *love*. The one, a burning vein of electric fire that riots through blood and brain—that makes the pulse beat to suffocation—that blinds the vision and inflames every sense; the other, a profound and perfect lulling of the soul to blissful rest—a foretaste of that supreme hour when the beatific raptures of angels shall open the new life of the redeemed spirit.

As for Faith—well, she did not know what had come to her, but the past and the future seemed alike to have been annihilated. The blessed present was enough for her.

She looked into the calm, grand eyes once more, and in them she beheld home, happiness, friends, *life*.

* * * * *

But nothing of all this passed their lips; their talk was of Faith's strange adventures. Warren felt it was neither the time nor the place to speak of love. For the present he was simply her guardian, her friend, her protector.

With many misgivings as to what that fair, innocent being might have to suffer from the knowledge of all the dreary incidents that had transpired during her absence, he determined first to restore her to her proper place in the social world, and await the course of events.

He simply informed her that a dreadful calamity had befallen her guardian; that he had been tried and found guilty of a felony, and condemned to imprisonment for life, and that he was then in Pennsylvania, undergoing his punishment; that her mother was still absent; that Leda was residing in the city; and that for the present he would occupy the position of her guardian, and take her to reside with his mother until he should receive instructions as to her own mother's wishes in her regard.

This programme was the best he could devise under the circumstances, and, by placing Faith in the seclusion of his own home, he could there defend her from the tongues of idle or cruel gossips until it was meet she should hear the whole bitter truth.

Immediately after their arrival in ———, and after charging his mother to permit no one save herself to have any

interviews with their dear young charge, Warren went to Mr. Craig to consult with him upon the proper course to be pursued. Before he had time to announce his business, the old lawyer said :

“Ah, sir, I am glad to have some good news for you ; it has been awaiting your return for over two weeks. Where on earth have you been?”

“To fetch Miss Hilary home.”

“Miss Hilary ! Humph ! it’s a bad time for *her* to appear *en scene*.”

“Why so, sir?”

“Well, simply because all of her property has just been consigned to another person.”

CHAPTER XLIV.

IN NOMINIS UMBRA.

“Given to another ! What can you mean?”

“Simply this—that Rachel Croft is dead, and that I have a letter from her, written just before her death, directing me to administer upon the will left in my hands, and that will bestows the whole of her property upon the heir which Mrs. Croft selected to take her daughter’s place.”

“Of course, the will must be declared null and void,” said Warren, with determined emphasis.

“We shall see about that. First, tell me the history of Miss Hilary’s re-appearance at this inopportune juncture.”

Warren proceeded to relate minutely and circumstantially all that had befallen the girl from the moment of her leaving Leda’s side at the picnic until the present instant.

Mr. Craig heard the narrative through without a comment until Warren concluded it.

The old lawyer, who was one of the social magnates, as well as the senior member of the bar at —, shook his gray head doubtfully, and, after a short silence, he horrified the young man by saying :

“Poor girl! I fear there isn’t much chance of her getting anybody to believe *that* tale, or to receive her into decent society, even if her relationship with Mathew Croft had not already ruined her prospects.”

Warren sat almost petrified with indignation. When he could manage his voice to speak calmly, he said :

“Sir, do I understand you, a gentleman and the husband and father of pure women, to be the first to deny this innocent girl’s claim to the sympathy and respect of society because of her father’s crime and her own dreadful misfortune in having disappeared with a man of infamous reputation?”

“My dear young friend, it is precisely *because* I am the ‘husband and father of pure women’ that I must be among the first to exclude all doubtful appearances from the society of which they and I are members. I am as

sorry for the girl as you are, and it was not I who made the terrible statute, 'the sins of the fathers shall be visited upon the children.' Furthermore, Miss Hilary's own statement affirms that she *voluntarily* placed herself in the position that led to all her subsequent disasters—if, indeed, she has not woven a thrilling romance to cover an escapade of a more than *probable* nature."

While Mr. Craig was giving expression to the latter clause of his remarks, Warren had risen to his feet. The bitterest and most sovereign contempt and anger shook his whole strong frame. He said, with scathing scorn :

"Sir, *one* tongue—a woman's—dared utter once before the sentiment that has just disgraced your lips. It would be no less cowardly in me to punish it in you, in the only way a man can punish *such* an offense, than if I had smitten her. Your great age and gray hairs defend you from my blows, but nothing shall defend you from my eternal contempt."

With this Warren strode from the presence of the old man, and from his house, leaving Mr. Craig quite stunned. He muttered to himself :

"Good Lord ! the fellow must be in love with her ! If so, I've made a sweet mess of it. He little dreams what I've got in store for him."

Meantime Gordon Warren retraced his steps toward his home and Faith, carrying a grieved and heavy heart in his breast.

Was it, indeed, true that poor little Faith's unhappy

accident of birth, and the result of her childish imprudence, were to become the means of her life-long humiliation?

He had heard almost the very same sentiment expressed by two persons, each an authority in the code of society, and each a fair representative of the class who were to pass sentence upon the fair, delicate young being, whose exquisite nature would be blasted utterly by one such stroke as had been given her that day.

As he reached his own gate he found his mother standing at it waiting for him. She said :

“My son, I want to say a few words to you before you go indoors. I know they will hurt you, but you ought to hear them. Leda came here while you were gone, and asked me about Faith’s coming, saying you had told her all. She then informed me that the moment it was known Faith had arrived and was with us the whole town would be rife with scandal, for that no people in their senses would believe one word of her sad story, and that we would not only have a convict’s daughter, but worse, on our hands.”

“And what did *you* say, my mother?”

His pale face wore an anxious agony as he put the question.

The old woman answered, very simply and earnestly :

“Why, my son, what was I to say but that it would be *our* pride and pleasure to love and shelter the child, and to honor instead of despising her for her sad mischance,

and that the world never lied more badly than when it touched that sweet angel's name with its foul insinuations."

"God bless you, my own good mother!"

Leaning down, he kissed the wrinkled old brow, and thanked Heaven that his life had sprung from the clean, true heart that beat under the snow-white kerchief pinned over Dame Warren's breast.

He passed on up the walk, bordered with lilac bushes.

The spicy scent of late chrysanthemums filled the evening air, and a few white lilies bloomed on a bed near the house.

He stooped and broke the freshest and purest from its stem, and then entered the house.

Within the sweet, tidy library Faith sat by a west window to catch the last light on the page she was reading.

She was freshly dressed in a pale-violet muslin, and her cheeks were faintly flushing as she lifted her face to meet Warren's.

He came at once to her side and fastened the lily in her hair, so that its sunny petal just touched the delicate ear.

"Your fingers are deft as a woman's," she said, laughing softly, as he finished pinning the flower to her coil of hair.

He did not speak for a minute, but stood quite near her, looking down upon her, half tenderly, half sadly, but with that deep worship in his eyes that was his soul's unuttered prayer to her. Then he said, lowly:

"Faith, are you glad to be here?"

"Glad! That is a poor, weak word. It is like reaching heaven after all that has been."

"Could you feel so, if you knew you were never to have any other or better home than this, child?"

"What should I care for a better?—this is so sweet and lovely a little spot in itself. Yet, after all, it is not the place that matters, it is how we feel in it."

"Do you 'feel' right in this one?" he asked, smiling.

"Yes; it seems to suit me—so still, so green, so peaceful."

"Better than Mr. Godfrey's splendid home?"

"Oh, so much better! Though that is beautiful, and I learned to love it; there was *so much* of it—one felt lost in those palatial rooms."

"Better than Lucerne?"

"I could never be happy again at Lucerne, with things so changed."

The tone was cold and sad; she was thinking of the master's fate.

Warren bent down to his knee beside her chair, and, looking straight into her eyes, he said:

"Faith, my beloved, this is *my* home, and I want it and myself to be yours forever. Will you have it so, dear?"

Her eyes made him all the answer that he needed, for he drew her to his breast and held her closely folded there

in a long, happy silence. Then he made her look up again, and said :

“My darling, if I should ask you to do a very unusual thing, just to show how much you love me, would you consent?”

“Of course I would.”

“No matter *what* it might be?”

“No matter what. If you wished it, it would be right.”

“Then, I want you to take my name, and my home, and *me*, right at once—to-morrow.”

“Then, I must.”

“What a gem of a woman you are, my pearl!”

“Why?”

“Never to make a word of objection, or give a sign of surprise, as other women would have done.”

“Then they could not know, and love, and trust you as I do. I would give you my life—why not my hand, when and as you want it?”

“No reason, dear child. Only others would have made one, I think.”

The next day, attended by his mother and a few intimate friends, Warren and Faith were married in a picturesque old church, which was the place of worship most affected by the grand *ton* of —.

Their nuptials were proclaimed by the sweet chime of the old bell, whose sonorous tongue had told the hour for birth, marriage, and death during many a year, and Mrs.

Grundy lost no time in catching up the note and repeating from ear to ear that the rising young lawyer and successor to Mathew Croft's large practice had brought home and married the convict's daughter, and the heroine of a strange romance. But, with that stalwart form and noble presence of Gordon Warren rising like an iron bulwark beside his young wife's frail loveliness, none dared so much as whisper the dark innuendo that lurked under many a smile that followed their happy steps.

Warren did not stir from home after returning thither with his bride from the church. But, after their small band of friends had drank their health and departed, he passed the blessed hours lying at Faith's feet in the quiet little library, and telling all the love and tenderness that was garnered up in his heart for her during that long separation when he thought her in heaven.

He simply reversed the usual order of such affairs, and made love after instead of before the wedding.

He was saying to her :

"Neither fortune nor worldly station are mine to offer you yet, sweet wife, but, having you, all other good and gracious gifts will follow in due season. Meantime, we shall not miss them. Shall we, Faith?"

The answer that she leaned down to give him was prevented by the knock of a visitor.

Warren frowned at the intrusion, but rose to attend to the summons, as no one else seemed to be near at hand.

At the door of the cottage stood Mr. Craig.

"Pardon my seemingly ill-timed call, Mr. Warren, but when you have heard my business with you, I fancy I shall be forgiven for interrupting even so sacred a holiday as this to make it known.

"Walk in, Mr. Craig," said Warren, with cold courtesy.

It was his own house, and for the time he must forget that Mr. Craig had uttered words that he never intended to forgive.

CHAPTER XLV.

"THE DAY IS DONE."

Faith had vanished ere the two gentlemen entered the library. Mr. Craig proceeded at once to explain his business by taking from his pocket a letter which he handed Warren. It ran thus:

"GALVESTON, 18—.

"MR. ELMORE CRAIG:

"*Dear Sir*:—Three days ago, when making my usual rounds through the cemetery here—of which I am and have been for two years the keeper—just before closing the gates for the night, my attention was arrested by a black object upon one of the marble slabs on the west side of the chapel.

"On approaching the tombstone, I found stretched upon it the body of a woman. She lay upon her back, with her hands crossed over her breast, and between her folded hands a letter. Either she had been placed there a corpse, or had placed herself there in the attitude of a corpse.

"On drawing near and touching her, I found that she was quite dead. The most remarkable-looking person, dead or alive, that it has ever been my luck to see—a skin like copper, and snow-white hair, brows, and lashes. The eyes were wide open, staring up to the sky, and as black as the night within her poor brain.

"I took the letter from her hands. It was addressed to 'The Keeper of the Graves.' I opened the large envelope, and took from it a heavy sheet of paper and another letter, sealed with wax. On the paper was written, in a cramped and tremulous hand :

" 'Bury me in the grave on which you find my body lying—it is an empty grave.'

"Of course, I said, the woman is some poor, mad creature. She was lying on a slab, inscribed :

" 'Sacred to the memory of my dear wife, Rachel Croft. A tribute of love and remembrance from her husband.'

"Had I any right to obey the dead woman's instructions, and bury her in the grave of Rachel Croft? was my natural inquiry of my conscience. I decided to consult the authorities.

"The sealed letter within the envelope addressed to 'The Keeper of the Graves' bears the superscription under which I write this. I forward *the whole* as I found it to your address, as given in the woman's letter.

"Meantime the authorities became as curious as myself, and it was decided to test the truth of the dead woman's assertion about the empty grave. It was opened, and a handsome metal casket disinterred. Within the casket lay—five large stones, packed in dry moss! We laid the dead body in the casket, in place of the stones. It fitted her exactly.

"The police were put on track of the strange dead body found in the cemetery. They brought light upon the mystery in the form of printed reports of a celebrated trial in your State, in which you were the prosecuting attorney. I presume the inclosed will explain all.

"Respectfully yours,

RUBEN PURCEL."

The contents of the sealed letter were very brief. They simply instructed Mr. Craig to prove the will of the deceased Rachel Croft, and to administer thereon without delay.

"And this, sir, is the will of the deceased," said Mr. Craig, handing a legal paper to Gordon Warren, and curiously watching his face the while. It was drawn up by Mr. Craig, signed by the deceased, and witnessed by Mr. Craig's copying clerk and another lawyer, Mr. Fields. It was simply this :

"To Gordon Warren, Esq., I bequeath, to him and to his heirs forever, the whole of my estate, without limitation or condition.

"Signed,

RACHEL CROFT."

As Warren read the brief, but to him strangely significant, testament of the unhappy being who had thus mysteriously passed out of existence, believing herself childless, and knowing herself utterly desolate, his heart was deeply wrung in presence of this tribute to his tenderness and fondness toward the child in whom the poor mother's all of life was centered.

He could not speak for a few moments, and, when he did, his eyes were moist and his lips trembled. He said, simply :

"It has all happened as she would have wished. I am glad it has."

Then he added, as he restored the will to Mr. Craig :

"You will do me the kindness to execute for me a deed making over the whole sum bequeathed to me by that testament to my wife, Faith Warren, and to her heirs."

Long after that, Faith said to her husband :

"Is it not strange that my mother should have chosen to pass her last days in Europe among strangers, and then

to die without leaving me a single clew to the mystery of why I was confided to the guardianship of that unhappy man, Mathew Croft?"

"This life is made up of strange things, my little wife, but your name and your nature is Faith. Trust me, it will all seem right when 'the secrets of all hearts are revealed' in the bright hereafter. We are happy—that is enough."

* * * * *

The bleak and bitter days of winter have come, and seared the earth dun and brown. It is Christmas-tide.

Leda Morgan sits before the window of her little music-room, with her forehead pressed against the panes of glass, gazing out into the cold, gray afternoon. She is all alone, and has been alone for days. The pupils have taken a holiday until after the great festival, and she has had nothing for a whole week to break the dull monotony of her solitude.

No one ever visits her, for she has no mind to receive such as *would* call, and she coldly repels all overtures from her neighbors in the house.

She has grown quite desperate with sitting there watching the heavy drift of leaden clouds, for the weather threatens snow. It has been long since she has caught even a glimpse of Gordon Warren. Since her insulting remarks of Faith, he has never been near her, though in many ways has made her feel that he looks after her comfort. She called once at his house after his marriage,

but, by his instructions, Faith had begged to be excused from receiving her, and, as she did not have any more poison to distill into Mrs. Warren's ear, she never went there again. But the cancer of her malignant hatred to Faith and disappointed passion for Warren was slowly eating out her life.

She rose from the window, and putting on some wraps and a thick vail, set forth to walk herself weary, that she might the sooner sleep and forget her misery. She followed the street on which she lived for one or two squares, and then passed into the handsomest and most aristocratic quarter of the town, where the wealthiest citizens had their residences, surrounded by large gardens and shrubberies. As she reached one of the most elegant of these, which had been for some months closed on account of the death of owner and the absence of his family, she was surprised to see the house opened and brilliantly lighted on the first floor. She paused beyond the iron railing that divided a spacious and elegant garden from the street, and looked wistfully across the rich flower-beds, with their fountains and the statuary gleaming here and there amid the dark shrubs and hedges, into a window that opened to the floor on the broad colonnade with marble columns.

The heavy velvet curtains were looped away, and through the closed glass doors the interior of the room was visible. The warmth of luxurious comfort and the soft splendor of wax-lights was within. A stream of light flowed out from the wide, tessellated hall upon the piazza.

Presently a lady came and sat herself at the piano near the curtained window. She had struck but a few chords when a man came and stood at her shoulder, and stroked her hair tenderly, and leaned over her fondly, then bent his lips down to hers. The lady was in an evening dress of pale-blue velvet, and a bandeau of pearls was bound about her brow. She had risen now, and the gentleman was folding a rich mantle of sables about her lovely bare shoulders. Then they came out of the hall together, his arm about her waist; the ripple of low, sweet laughter was answering something he had just said to her. They passed down the pebble walk to the gate, only a few yards from where Leda was standing on the pavement shivering with cold in the darkness.

An elegant phaeton stood before the gate, and into this the gentleman assisted the lady, and wrapped about her the carriage furs.

"Are you sure you are quite warm, my darling?" he said, as he stepped in beside her.

"Quite sure, Gordon."

"To Colonel Manley's," said the gentleman to his coachman, and the carriage drove away.

Leda remained as if frozen into an image of ice where she stood.

Colonel Manley's was *the* house of the city. To cross *its* portals was to enter the enchanted circle of the *noblesse*.

Leda knew from her landlady that Colonel Manley gave a grand Christmas ball on this night.

It was to this feast that Gordon Warren was taking his bride. The munificent fortune into which Mr. Warren had come with his marriage had condoned all the offenses connected with it.

Leda stood watching the grand mansion long after the master and mistress had passed from sight.

A man walked by her up the street. She said:

"Who lives here now?"

"Mr. Warren, madam. He bought the place some time ago, but has only recently moved into it. It was undergoing repairs and refurnishing."

The informant passed on.

Slowly, and as if unable to drag her feet from the spot, Leda retraced her steps.

When she reached her own room it looked smaller than ever—the fire had burned out on the hearth, the lamp shone feebly, the place was so still, so lonely, so chill.

She sat down by the table, and leaned her white, haggard face on her hand; over and over, and over again she seemed to be seeing that tableau through the window, as Gordon Warren leaned in adoration over the fair, angelic face of his wife, and kissed her lips. The silent air of the close little room seemed to re-echo the sound of Faith's happy laughter.

"Ah, my God! how can I bear it, and not go mad?" moaned the wretched Leda.

But bear it she must. Life stretched drearily out before her; she was still so young.

"Is her curse being wrought out, I wonder?" she cried; and, casting her hat and cloak from her, she went to a desk and took forth a letter.

She spread it out beneath the lamp. It was crookedly and feebly written, as if the hand that penned it had been too weak to guide the pen. The words were few, but they were terrible:

"He loved *you* even as he loathed *me*. But his love and his hate shall be alike our mutual ruin. *My* long trouble is at its close, and I shall lie down to sleep in the bed he made for me years ago. *Your* pain is but begun; but it will work its will as mine did, only without the consolation that sweetened my sufferings until you robbed me of it. I worshiped him, and I could bear to endure; you *must* endure, while the dull agony feeds on your life-blood till the last drop is drunk. From your glorious beauty to withered age like mine you must live on, knowing that your love will have no reward here or hereafter. The man you love will turn from you with a bitterer scorn than that which blasted my life. When all is done, which of us, I wonder, will envy the other? When your pain stings the keenest, be patient, and remember HIS OTHER WIFE."

THE END.

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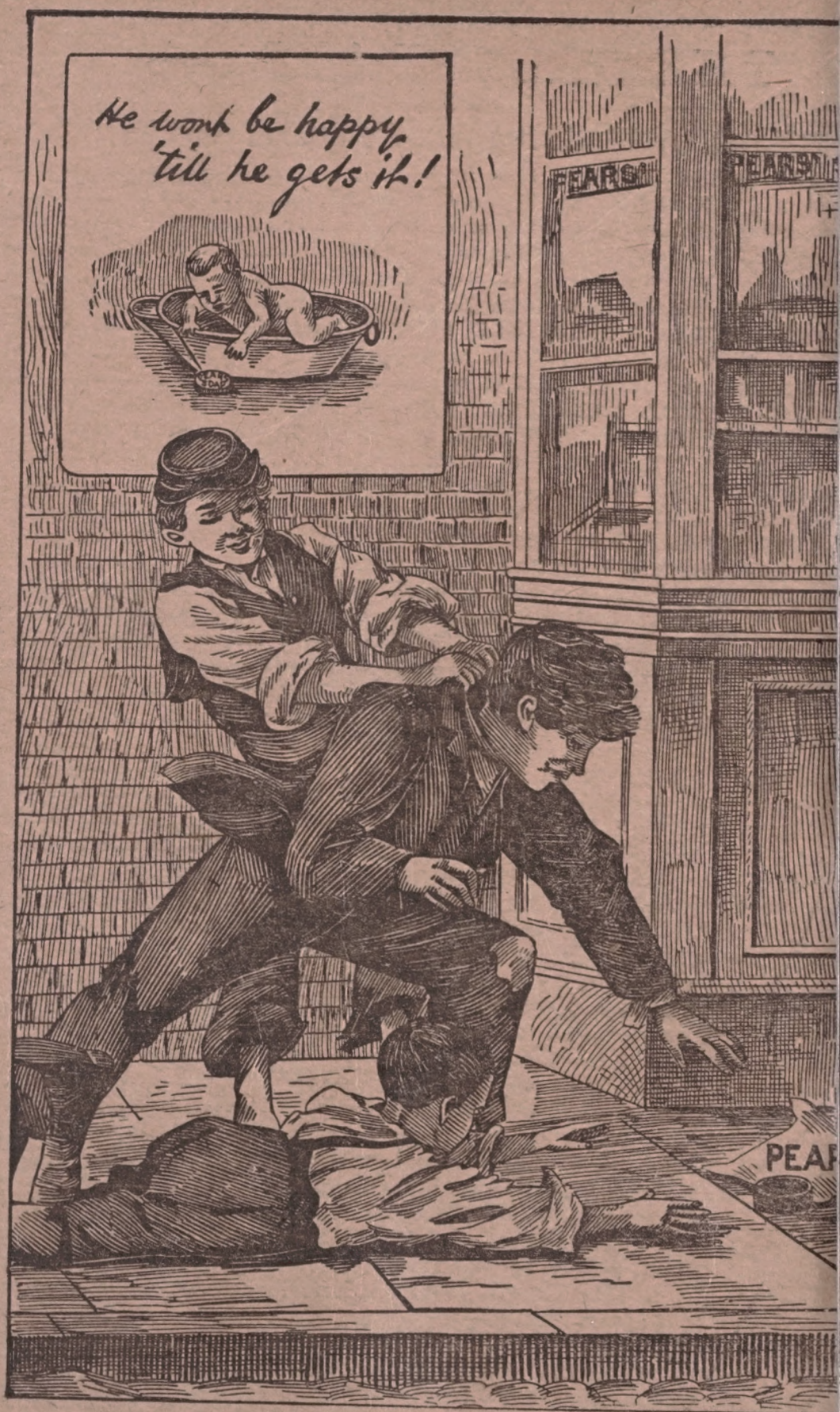
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